

the
peak
education
issue



volume 54
issue 1
fall
2014

free
take one

WELCOME TO DEBILITATING STUDENT DEBT.

*Would you like something
to drink with that?*

The Peak

Volume 54
Issue 1
Fall 2014

On the Web:
www.guelphpeak.org

The Peak Magazine

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The countless hours it took to
produce this magazine were
generously donated, thank you to
everyone who contributed.

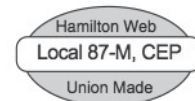


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Introducing... Education

IT'S BACK TO SCHOOL TIME. FOR SOME OF US, SEPTEMBER brings a sense of excitement and anticipation, crisp new notebooks and big plans to attend every class and get some As. Some of us are cringing about another semester of overpriced tuition and juggling work and school. Some more of us are anxiously contemplating our futures, wondering if we should finish those degrees or do that vocational training program, or just breathing a sigh of relief that we don't ever have to go back to school. Some of us are dreaming of attending school, longing for the privilege of overpriced textbooks, structure and opportunity that school can bring while working our under-paid jobs.

Our experiences of schooling are political, shaped by our gender, sexuality, race, class, and so much more. Learning happens everywhere: what if there were models of education that start from that principle, instead of segregating education into specific spaces and frameworks? When we get together to share skills and have conversations we challenge that separation. We begin to redefining what education means, on our own terms. How do we create and maintain spaces where liberatory education can happen, and how do we navigate the systems that already exist?

This issue highlights perspectives on the ways we learn (and unlearn), as well as the experience of individuals in our education system, "School as the First System of Oppression" (page 26) speaks to the experience of one racialized individual in public school. "Youth Liberation and Deschooling" (page 16) touches on themes of youth liberation and the marginalization of kids and youth in and out of school. "Nobody's Good at Everything but Everybody is Good at Something" (page 20) addresses learning outside of school, where mentorship fosters learning as a part of our daily relationships.

We celebrate liberatory education systems, and we wonder what others could look like. We dream of models of learning that nurture our skills, challenge systems based in inequality, and build solid relationships with ourselves and others. The contributors to this issue are helping to build those models, and are asking the questions that make this work get better and better.

Let's do it,
The Peak Collective





Call for Submissions:

"Arts & Community" Issue

In our Autumn issue, The Peak magazine is excited to explore the role of art in our communities. More than self-expression, the arts can be a liberatory practice: a tool for building our movements, documenting our histories and opposing power.

We want to hear from dancers, DJs, visual artists, writers, storytellers, musicians, curators, zinesters, poets, designers, filmmakers, event organizers and performers of all stripes: What do you do? Why do you do it? What keeps you going? How does your art practice relate to your politics?

We invite folks to explore the following question concepts, and more:

- The ways we use art to affirm our identities
- How we curate spaces for our art
- How art informs and documents struggle
- How art can be a tool to reclaim and celebrate culture and challenge systems of domination
- How we sustain our art in spite of capitalism/making a living as an artist
- Art as a force of and response to gentrification
- What are the ways we can use art to communicate and publicise our struggles

Please send us your visual art or photography (in high-res .jpeg, .tiff, or .pdf formats - 300dpi or more), poetry, and prose.

**THE DEADLINE FOR SUBMISSIONS
TO "ARTS AND COMMUNITY"
IS OCTOBER 3RD, 2014.**

LEFT Peak office
circa. 1990

PHOTO credit:
unknown

Drop In, Drop Out: Life After School

Interviewed by The Peak Collective

I DROPPED OUT OF HIGH SCHOOL TO HAVE SEX WITH MY boyfriend. There didn't seem to be a good reason to leave school until I started dating someone from a different school and needed more time for sex. I dropped out of college because I thought I didn't want to go into kitchen management and just wanted to cook. I dropped out of university [in 2004] because I thought paying tens of thousands of dollars not to really learn anything was stupid. My mama was pretty angered. My dad was disappointed. My friends were fairly supportive.

I think it definitely improved my life. I am not such a programmed robot anymore.

It's harder to get a job or show that you have cred[it] for the things you know how to do and/or the smarts that you have. Sometimes, in academic circles it's really hard to be respected even if you are a really strong thinker.

[Nowadays] I mostly parent and do healing work, homemaking and poetry. —Amelia

From elementary school to throughout university, I've always found that with Western teaching and learning styles, I tend to feel rushed; there's a high level of conformity to values and standards that I feel are problematic, encouraged to "fake it til you make it" too much as opposed to ensuring integrity. It feeds into the dominant culture's promotion of us living much too much within the view of ourselves projected by others. Notta lotta allowance for different learning curves and styles nor modeling wisdom nor being in touch with your emotions. Notta lotta encouraging authenticity, humility and vulnerability, which, in turn, would all support connection with self and others. This may be why I find that Indigenous pedagogy optimizes my thriving in learning. I dread the dominant formal educational systems as these circumstances hinder my learning.

In my experience, Western/Eurocentric, top-down, didactic teaching methods, any patronizing style of teaching generally harms rather than facilitates/enriches my learning and performance. Instead of encouraging actions rooted in critical thinking and self-awareness, unproductive dynamics can arise. I feel Western styles of teaching create more pressure and reawaken the competitive, individualist parts of ourselves that has always been nurtured by the dominant culture. Whereas the dominant culture commonly promotes values overloaded with superficial, immediate "benefits", I find that learning methods promoting a balance of critical, rigorous questioning, reflecting, and practicing cultivate substance and significantly more open-mindedness and substantial understanding and skillfulness with the material.

Indigenous learning systems from specific places of origin, in general, cannot be oversimplified as often they are constantly adapting to the dynamic interplay of changing experiential knowledge and changing social values. However, as I refer to them, I am referring to deeply embedded values that I have identified in my experience with working with indigenous pedagogy. Over the past years I've sought out indigenous pedagogy from peoples indigenous to colonized Philippines. In these models, mentoring and learning are both an art that go hand in hand with developing humyns who will help build a healthier world for all, including by validating and enhancing the experiences of marginalized people. Also, both have the perspective that self-reflection is core to cultivating wisdom and conscious, critical thinking skills, and it internalizes teaching— and all this knowledge attained has spiritual, emotional, and physical dimensions. I love the perspective that the teacher/facilitator and student/learner have interdependent, reciprocating

roles; there's an understanding that both have gifts, and that both roles are there to open each other's mind and ignite the expressing of each other's gifts, while acknowledging that many of us develop our potentials on unfair and inequitable playing fields. As is reflective of my learning style, in general, I am always striving to work within a decolonization-rooted framework. To re-indigenize. —Mary Carl

[I dropped out of university because] I didn't really understand what anyone was talking about because the language was mega inaccessible. One day in class people were arguing about whether direct action or academic papers were more important and I realized that the people around me all thought they were really contributing to revolutionary change by writing shit no one would see and that I was contributing to that same system so I said "fuck it."

A lot of the punks were proud of me, my mom got it, but my immigrant dad that worked mega hard so I could even go to school was really stressed out. I mean he never had a chance to do that shit and worked like sixteen hour days every day and was worried. I think he gets now that I can be successful without going to university and that I'm a very driven person. I think I actually had a harder time with the punks. They would talk about dropping out in this way that totally invisibilized my father's experience and made him seem stupid for caring and made me feel stupid for trying to work with my dad to find solutions. While I'm all about dropping out if that's what's right for you I find the language around it doesn't really acknowledge that for some people school is resistance. Like education is a tool. You need [degrees] to do so much shit in this world and when white supremacy dictates your whole experience as a person of colour you need to figure out ways to change that, whether it's going

to school and becoming a teacher to teach youth in your community or becoming a doctor who actually gives a fuck about what your people are going through. Having black, indigenous and people of colour in power who understand history is so so important because so often our histories are inherently radicalizing. I think it's all about your goal and figuring out how to get there. Resistance looks like a lot of shit, just some people can't see that, probably because they don't understand history.

I didn't stop educating myself, I just looked for education elsewhere. I learned a hell of a lot from the people around me and I still do. I think it really helped me understand that every conversation is a learning experience and that if I want to know something I gotta find ways to figure it out. My only challenge, I think, was proving myself to my dad but I think I'm there. Like, he sees me now and I know he thinks I'm really smart and I'm doing good stuff, that I won't settle for any less than I deserve and I know how to make shit happen. So I think that challenge of proving myself to my dad was in fact a gift of finding ways to really prove to myself that I didn't need to go to university to do the shit I dream of.

I ended up learning a lot about herbs, workshop facilitation, event planning, grant writing, etc... I organize a lot of events and love it but I'm hoping to do more healing work. —Shabina

I was supposed to be the first person in my family to graduate from college. A lot of my identity as a young person, and positive regard from my family, was based on being smart and doing well in school.

A couple years after dropping out of college, I trudged through a certificate in Community Mental Health. Instead of going to the program graduation, I went to a conference on mental health

“Being educated to me means being willing to remain engaged in dialogue about issues you find important.”

“For some people school is resistance.

Like, education is a tool.”

and human rights that was full of pissed-off radical crazy folks. It was so formative for me to hear people make connections between our fucked-up world and psychiatrization, things I knew with my heart but didn't have the words to articulate. It confirmed that the knowledge that feels vital to me wouldn't come from programs and degrees.

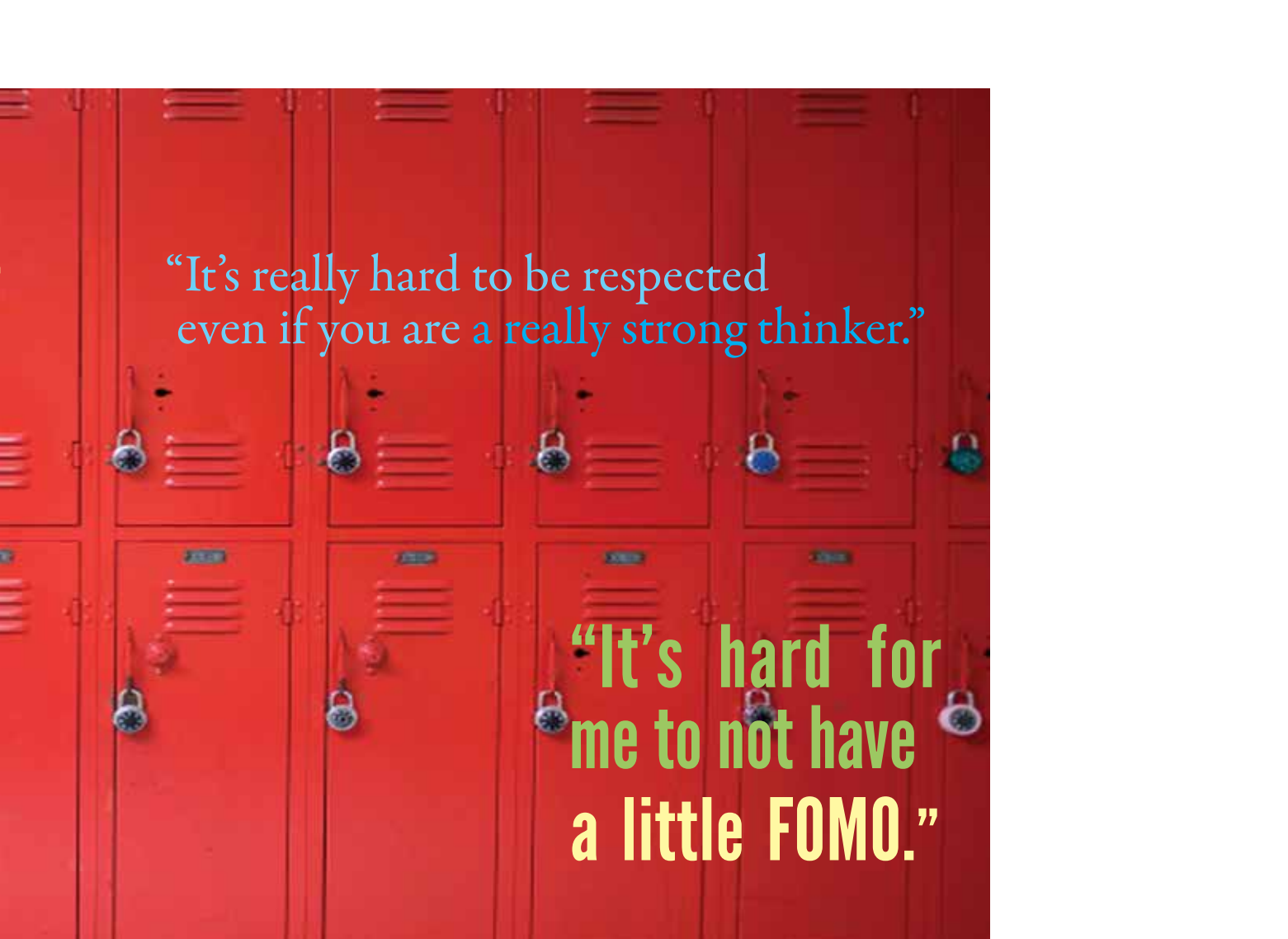
Learning about unschooling/deschooling/alternative schooling movements has been hugely important for my politics. It's not just about dropping out, it's about actively creating alternatives. I think a lot about mentorship and what that looks like in radical spaces/movements, specifically mentorship that is informal, reciprocal—both as a strategy for horizontal (or whatever) education and as a way to push back against the hierarchies of skill and knowledge that our movements are not immune to. I would like all radical folk to see ourselves as mentors, in the things we do and in our relationships with each other, and consider what joys and responsibilities go along with that.

I'm going back to school to do a diploma in acupuncture and western herbalism. It's an uneasy compromise. I know that educational institutions,

especially traditional medicine schools, are often hella colonial and that I'm going to be pissed off a lot of the time. I want to find ways to make what I take from this schooling compatible with healing justice work. —Danielle

I went to university for one year and then dropped out in 2007, after my second semester. I was having a good time in school but I quickly felt like I was spending an absurd amount of money for people to tell me what books to read, and I realized I could do that on my own. On top of that, I was not even able to get into all the classes I wanted to take because of “limited space”, which felt absurd because of how expensive the school was. I knew that I would be able to support myself playing poker, which allowed me the freedom to leave.

Dropping out improved my life. For one thing I now felt free, flexible and excited about my education. I spent the year after leaving school reading and learning a lot—much more than when I was actually in school—on my own. It also allowed me the freedom to go on tour, which is the main thing I wanted to be doing at the time. I realized that



“It’s really hard to be respected
even if you are a really strong thinker.”

“It’s hard for
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really there is no “time off” from education—you can learn in all kinds of ways and in all kinds of situations.

I do feel that if I had stayed in school I would have developed certain skills and knowledge differently, and perhaps more effectively. Perhaps I would be better self-disciplined; perhaps I’d be a better writer; perhaps I would have stronger social skills; perhaps I’d have different connections; perhaps I’d have learned more about handling finance or any number of other things. Which is not to say that I regret leaving; it’s just hard for me to not have a little FOMO.

These days I make up songs, play and coach poker, cook food and make cocktails, skateboard, do magic tricks, travel, read, play, set up DIY shows, hike, garden, whatever. I’m currently trying to buy a house. —Dustin

I graduated high school with pretty high marks. I remember being so excited about attending University because it meant leaving my small home town. My parents paid my tuition as long as I could cover rent and the rest of life, so I entered University

in a very privileged position.

I did about 2 years before dropping out. Once I became invested in the anarchist, punk, diy and dropout culture and values it felt impossible for me to justify attending school. I felt very dispassionate about what I was learning, and it seemed like a scam. It turns out I wasn’t particularly good at writing essays or sitting through long classes so dropping out made sense.

Dropping out was awesome! I had way more time to hang out with my new political friends, learn new stuff, go to occupations, travel around and learn skills I considered to be more practical than what I’d been getting in University. My parents were disappointed but I was pretty convinced the collapse of industrial civilization, or at least capitalism, was right around the corner, so why did I need to worry about a career? (They are still disappointed and regularly suggest I go back to school.)

I worked in a lot of shitty kitchens, dishwashing and making food. I never got into positions which made tips so, on minimum wage, I remained perpetually broke. Plus, with a combination of mental health issues, I was finding it harder and

harder to work full or even part time jobs. I calculated that as an 'unskilled' and highly unmotivated worker, the job that could give me the highest return for the least amount of time spent working was something in the field of sex work, a job I choose freely and with a high degree of privilege. I was 22. At 28 now, sex work has been my longest career. There are lots of shitty things about the multiple jobs I've done under that banner, but for the most part, sex work has kept me independent, clothed, housed, and well fed.

Often, when I'm experiencing an identity crisis, I wonder if I should go back to school. Sometimes I even do! I've taken a herbalism course as well as attended college. I attended conferences and book fairs. I try to read academic books about subjects I find relevant, like prison and gender and white supremacy. This fall, I'll be undertaking a slow moving certificate program through open education about poetry & creative writing, which was my original love.

Being educated to me means being willing to remain engaged in dialogue about issues you find important. This has been difficult for me during times when mental health and physical security was more difficult to maintain. Having a continual fall back of very accessible (for me) sex work to keep me afloat has brought me to where I am now, which I guess would be a combination of learning from life experiences, peers, and allies. Trying to motivate myself to learn new things, trying to participate in projects I find meaningful. —Anon

The year I decided not to return to school I was sent a letter stating that I was to be placed on academic probation (I had a GPA lower than 2.6) if I planned to attend University the following semester. I was in the middle of trying to make the decision to go west with my boyfriend at the time so he could attend college for sound engineering. The letter was the tipping point showing that I really didn't have any interest in spending any more time in my program or any more money on this kind of education.

I don't think I told anyone right away and might have framed it as I am going to go out west to find better opportunities, which, when if you come from a small town on the east coast of Canada, is a valid reason for anything.

I went back to school to learn a practical skill that, at the time of enrolment and until the last semester of school, I thought would get me a career. The last semester was spent preparing us for a career and it was those last few weeks of graphic design school that soured my whole outlook on the industry. I decided to not to work in the mainstream

industry but instead apply my skills to nonprofits, political projects and personal projects. Applying my skills in this way is not going to make me a rich guy or even pay bills on the regular but it lets me keep my soul. —e.war

I finished a degree in sociology, I dropped out several times, but always found myself back in school. School, since kindergarten, was always a struggle for me, I'm a poor reader and writer, and have little to no attention span and memory. I always have to be on Ritalin to succeed in school, which messes with my emotional well being. In all sorts of ways I feel like I faked my way through school, I still don't know how to spell, or read real good or even form proper sentences, it's all kind of a joke. I remember having a teachers assistant and spending all of time in the resource room. The general consensus was that I wouldn't be attending university, and that me getting through high school would be a big achievement in itself. So part of me started university as a fuck you to them. But university got old fast and clashed with my so called radical politics. The Ritalin was driving me bonkers and I had to spend so much time doing school, it made it really hard to do the other thing that brought me joy and felt important. Dropping out was really important to me, it removed my life of pre-determined meaning, when I dropped out (which I did about three times) it forced me to find meaning and motivation and a life of my own. Rather than relying on early morning essay writing to get me out of bed, or mid-afternoon cue card sessions to define what a productive day meant, I had to quantify the worth of my life using my own standards, and motivations. So I am grateful for dropping out. But now I'm going back. I did, and continue, to do sex work to pay for my education, and I realise how privileged I am to be able to get paid really good, because of my class background, race and general femmeness.

I really enjoyed my time not "working" or going to school, the time I spent hitch hiking, black blocing, library going, exploring and having all the time in the world to support my friend and community was amazing, but for me drop out culture is a privilege, a privilege I'm stoked that some of my friends enjoy, it gives them time and motivation to pursue really amazing work, and live a life full of uncompromising joy. But I think it's important to remember for all of us drop-out culture is a privilege, and kind of weird thing to be able to live a life that goes hand in hand with your desires, while most people can't. So anyways now I am going to get a masters in social work, because I feel I have an opportunity to do some good work. I want to

learn anger management skills, better counselling skills and eventually offer counselling inside and outside of prisons. Sometimes I wonder why I'm going back to school when I know I could make a really good living doing sex work. But I think not going to school would be like not using all the privileges I have, so that I could pretend to be not privileged. I think if I didn't go to school, it would be because it's way cooler to drop out and be a broke punk with only a few privileges, than it does to be a social worker and that seems like a weird reason. I know it's reformist and social work is really colonial, but I also think there's room to do some cool work. I see university as a hoop I'm going to jump through in order to find myself in a position where I can support folks most screwed over by this world. I no longer will be relying on school for meaning, purpose etc but be using it, and the privileges I have, to do work that I earnestly think is important. —Anon

Since dropping out five years ago, “education” looks less to me like the hurdle it did when I started university, and more like another of the guns that society holds to the heads of its members (though this particular one aims predominantly at youth).

When I started school, I had the intention of effecting social change by becoming a teacher myself, as past teachers had demonstrated for me. Though I was critical of all “educational” systems of the time, and would have proclaimed to have been for their abolition, this was based only on seeing the way that these systems reproduced the society that gave birth to them: keeping younger people off the job market long enough to maintain employment levels while inculcating them with nationalistic, hierarchical and capitalistic values.

Now, as I have seen just about every one of my dropped-out comrades return to some educational institution, and as I weigh my options for surviving in the future, I've realized that education reproduces society in much more material ways. In a world where masters students are competing for barista jobs, the post-secondary institutions hold our futures hostage. It dooms us to a life of minimum wage (if we're lucky) unless we put ourselves in thousands of dollars of debt to participate in the ever-more precarious rat race for miserable careers.

The post-secondary institution sentences us to life-long poverty unless we give it our free labour, paying for our own job training (this becomes obvious with each new college program to correspond to a slightly-above-minimum-wage “career”).

As I embark on the latter part of my twenties without any diplomas, degrees, or marketable skills, school is once again becoming more of a tempting

prospect. I maintain that what passes for formal education in this world has no place in the world I hope to live in, but it seems that I'm left with few options. —Anon

I am currently enrolled in a two year diploma program for Community Work. I begin my second year this September. I entered college as a mature student, having dropped out of high school with only my grade 9 and one grade 10 credit. [I left high school because] I had a lot of struggles with mental health, and had a hard time balancing part-time work, school and crazy. I despised going, I was FULL of anxiety - I hated talking to people, I hated jocks, I hated being looked at, I hated feeling dumb.

I spent many years working full time, I got involved in my community: I organized locally and politically. These days, I play music, I take care of myself better each year, and I still watch a lot of movies and sleep too much.

I hope going back to school now will help me to learn the skills I need to function/communicate with a broader population in regards to my community work and my organizing. I'm still trying to figure [the relationship between education and my politics] out for myself. After two decades of shit-talking formal education, being a student often fucks with my self-identity. I appreciate the new knowledge and experiences I am gaining, but am also infuriated at the inaccessibility of it all and this bullshit idea that I was and would be less were I not in school. I grew up with the idea of me attending college being a joke. And now that I am here, I am taking what I can from it - but a school is still a fucked up institution with a lot of fucked up games that need to be played to get ahead. I struggle with this— but I also feel as though this is something I need to try out in my life, and am strengthening many skills I may not have otherwise. Strangely enough, I'm an anarchist who has trouble learning new knowledge and skills when there is a lack of structure involved. Go figure. —Anne Δ



We Learn so We can be Free: Toronto Africentric School Redefines Black Education

Interviewed by Guelph Prison Radio

Leroi: Hey, my name is Leah Newbold. My friends call me Leroi. I'm a teacher at Toronto Africentric School, and I teach grade one. Africentric School is an elementary alternative school in the Toronto District School Board. It's a community initiative that was lobbied for by parents and educators. We just finished our fifth year with our new principal, Joan Lattie. Africentric school is Toronto's first public Africentric school, but it's not Toronto's first Africentric school. There's been a rich history of community-based, Black-focused and Africentric schooling, including Umoja in Rexdale.

Mina: Can you talk a bit about why you think schools like these are important?

Leroi: Schools like Africentric are important, first and foremost I believe that Black education should be initiated and designed by Black communities, and I believe our institutions need to be transformed to contribute to the liberation of our people. For descendants of enslaved people in Canada, the US and the Caribbean, education is rooted in the fight for liberation. In my first year of teaching my grade two students, we read this book called *Nightjohn*¹. *Nightjohn* was an enslaved man who worked in the fields on a plantation, and he

survived horrific things at the hand of his master, and when he arrived from his plantation his back was raw from whipping and he was hauling the chariot attached to his neck. What the children learned is that *Nightjohn* had once escaped from slavery, and that he came back to enslavement as his own choice, to teach people on the plantation how to read. Because *Nightjohn* knew that the punishment for teaching slaves to read was very severe, if people were caught teaching slaves to read in Canada and the US they would often have a finger or toe cut off. *Nightjohn* came back to teach because he knew that reading would help to make his people free. Enslaved people who knew how to read could write passes to cross checkpoints in the night, they could read their masters' record books. What we're teaching our kids is that we learn so we can be free, and we're teaching them to participate in the fight for our freedom, our liberation.

Shabina: Can you describe what the school-to-prison pipeline is, and how it works?

Leroi: The "school-to-prison pipeline" is a term that was coined in the US, but I think it's also applicable to Canada. It looks at how students are pushed out of schools and into prison, because of institutional

¹ *Nightjohn* by Gary Paulsen

neglect, because of disengagement, and because of employing the Cultural Deficit Model, where our students are basically given the message that they can't learn.

For example, in Toronto we have a forty percent push-out rate for Afro-Caribbean students, and in the Canadian context, the school-to-prison pipeline [refers to] the overrepresentation of Black boys in special education, the over-policing of Black youth in schools and neighbourhoods like Jane and Finch and Malvern, and how these experiences contribute to the disproportionately high number of Black men and women in Ontario prisons.

Mina: How do you think Africentric School is disrupting the pipeline?

Leroi: Africentric disrupts the pipeline because it operates from the philosophy that our students deserve safety, love, respect and power, a philosophy of personal responsibility for teachers. As opposed to a cultural deficit model, personal responsibility means that if my students failed, then I failed as an educator. So I will [work to make] my students successful by any means necessary because I have love for my community. So Africentric School disrupts the pipeline by make students successful. In our first year, our school had eighty-one percent of our students reaching provincial standard in writing and math and seventy percent reaching standard in reading so that was actually higher than the percentage of students reaching standards at the Toronto District School Board and in the province of Ontario. And in the States for example; they have a one hundred percent graduation rate which means students will be moving on with skills and also with self confidence and self love.

Shabina: Do you have any idea of what the success rates of Black students are in non-Africentric public schools?

Leroi: Well typically students in our communities tend to underscore on both standardized tests. Especially in the area our school is, the Keele and Sheppard area, and most of the students at our school are from the Jane and Finch area, so a lot of the schools there tend to underperform not because the kids can't achieve but because they aren't being engaged in that test. I mean that test is also biased, but that

doesn't mean that our students can't succeed in it; we succeed in life and all sorts of institutions that are biased.

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for our freedom.

Mina: Can you talk a little bit about how your approach is different than the methods used in other public schools?

Leroi: The approach differs in terms of curriculum but also in terms of instruction, we use Ontario curriculum but through the lens of African and Caribbean experiences and also through the lens of anti-oppression. For example if I'm teaching about the migration of mammals in science or something I may choose to teach about the migration of Africans in the diaspora. You can interpret [the curriculum] in a lot of different ways. We also place a lot of emphasis on the arts because it's something that's engaging for our students; especially performance, music, dance and looking at teaching literacy and numeracy through the arts. Last year at the holidays my grade ones learned how to sing Esperanza Spalding's "Black Gold" but they also learned how to read the lyrics and learned how to act out the skit and record it on film. They were on stage singing 'Hold your head as high as you can, high enough to see who you are little man. Life sometimes is cold and cruel but no one may tell you so remember that you are Black gold.' So they will learn a lot of things through the arts.

Shabina: If you could send a message to public school teachers about how to work with Black students, what would you say?

Leroi: I would say that if you're a non-Black teacher in a public school then you have a responsibility to learn about what anti-Black racism is and you have a responsibility to take leadership from Black community— from your students, from your students' parents, from surrounding community, and do not use a

cultural deficit model to explain Black student failure. Take responsibility. You have responsibility to seek out examples where Black students are successful and to replicate those examples within your classroom. Also you need to understand our students are Black gold and that our children mean everything to us so you have our everything in your hands. Don't take that responsibility and privilege lightly.


Mina: Can you explain what the Cultural Deficit Model is for people who may have never heard that term before?

Leroi: Cultural Deficit Model basically says that our students aren't successful in the institution because of our culture, because parents don't care about their kids, their kids doing well, because of poverty or because something within our culture prevents us from being successful. Obviously that's not true because there are so many other education institutions in which we are successful, historically and now. So that's why I'm saying people need to look at those examples and to change the system to learn how to be successful for our students.

Mina: Is there anything you want to add?

Leroi: I guess a lot of people were asking about the high school and at the time there wasn't a high school yet but Africentric Elementary now feeds into two high schools, one at Downsview and one in Scarborough. So if people are looking to do their GED or high school those are also alternative possibilities now.

Shabina: So for people who are maybe interested in sending their kids to your school could you give out contact info on the school?

Leroi: Yeah, you can find it on the Toronto District School Board website and it's called Africentric Alternative School, it's located at 1430 Sheppard Avenue West. 



Of Teenage Heartbreak & Rebellion: High School Women's Studies in the 1990s

by Lisa B.

THIS IS A STORY OF SLIPPERY PEDESTALS AND DISAPPOINTMENTS, of teenage heartbreak and rebellion. This is a true story. I have changed only the names.

It was in 1996, my second semester of 11th grade, I sat in my first women studies class. Every day for an hour and twenty minutes between 9:44am and 11:07am, we deconstructed the history of patriarchy, created our own working definitions of feminism, critically examined the mass media and developed our understanding of gender as an organizing principle in society. Our desks were arranged in a semi-circle and we were allowed to have snacks in class. I loved my women studies class. Women studies changed my life when I was seventeen.

Orchestrating all of this was Ms. Valerie Prendergast. She was a small woman, almost always in pants and wore no makeup, sporting a short bob and a huge smile. She crammed the chalkboard with her looping enthusiastic scrawl, using a mirror of the Venus symbol instead of writing the word "women", said "hey gals!" when she saw us in the halls, never ever referring to a group of girls as "guys".

She paced back and forth as she spoke to us, not with the cagey energy of a trapped beast but as if the topic at hand was too exciting, too immediate for stillness – and it was! She lived with buoyancy

and joy. She didn't pry open anyone's mind – she merely showed us how vivid and vast a world we could inhabit if we so chose.

Sometimes, on Mondays, she'd cartwheel into class.

I loved my women's studies teacher.

Everyone knew that Ms. Prendergast was gay, except of course for those who chose not to know. Like many professionals, she lived in a selectively opaque closet. Once, when someone referred to her as "Mrs. Prendergast" she gasped, reeled in pretended shock, drew a hand dramatically across her forehead and said "Whew! You scared me! ... I thought I'd gotten married by accident!"

She conducted herself with articulate grace. Once, on a particularly outrageous day, she told her grade nine history class that God is a black lesbian.

It was apparent to me that her feminism was about making the world a more loving place, where girls and women as well as boys and men (and everyone in-between, though we touched very lightly on that topic) were more empowered to like themselves. She helped me to reach an understanding that my dad was a domineering asshole not simply because he was a man, and therefore made that way, but because of his conditioning, and although this newfound comprehension didn't speed up my

graduation and my subsequent escape, it did free me, at seventeen, of some anger and cynicism about men in general.

This is a true story. Valerie Pendergast changed my life in 1996.

It was nearing the end of the school year. I had paid eager attention everyday (except for one distracted morning while Jessica Miller smoothed a temporary tattoo to the exposed skin of her knee while seated across from me with a deliberate and slow one-two-three of her pink tongue – but that’s a different story) and it was time for our final assignment. We were to research and then embody a female feminist thinker, and teach a class in our chosen persona. There was much wretchedness and moaning about the prospect of public speaking, but I was thrilled. Who to choose? This had to be good.

I was browsing in the Kingston Public Library one Friday night when a title caught my eye: *Forbidden Passages*. It was a collection of writings seized by Canadian Customs, deemed too obscene to cross over the border into Canada. I read it with a growing indignation of the censorship perpetrated by the Canadian government, of entire shipments of books stalled in wet warehouses, left to rot. I read of a chili pepper cookbook called *Hot, Hotter, Hottest* which was stopped by border guards who didn’t bother reading past the title.

I learned about a small bookstore in Vancouver fighting a legal battle with Canada customs over these issues. And I read the works in the book, which ranged from queer theory to racial politics to erotic short fiction to an essay exposing prenatal perineal massage as fisting, by someone named Susie Bright who seemed very excited about it. Most of all, I read and reread the foreword, by Pat Califia. She was Pat then, not yet Patrick, and had he not still been a she then I do not know how the rest of this story would be told. But anyways, at the time, Pat Califia was an intelligent and angry leatherdyke in San Francisco with scathing things to say about censorship, whether it was by governments, feminists, queers, or all three. She explained that quite often the very laws lobbied for by feminists like Andrea Dworkin to protect women from exploitation by the pornography industry were then used to censor queer sexual writings and imagery. She was fed up with gays trying to fight for respectable, desexualized inclusion with mainstream heterosexual society, as if that would combat homophobia.

Pat Califia wasn’t ever going to fit in. And she didn’t want to.

I was hooked. I signed out a copy of Califia’s collected essays, ‘Public Sex: the Culture of Radical Sex’ from the Queen’s University library on my dad’s card, and while I didn’t comprehend or feel comfortable about everything she said, I agreed

wholeheartedly with her assertion that if the censors have their way, eventually we will not even have access to the information we need in order to disagree intelligently with one another, and that would be a very, very bad thing.

My life as a sex-positive feminist had begun. Pat Califia changed my world when I was seventeen. I have left that name unchanged.

I put together a smashing presentation. I had been simultaneously aroused and repelled by Califia’s erotic story excerpt in *Forbidden Passages*, and while I knew that I would never, ever want to be spanked, whipped, or tied up –

Nor would I ever want to do that to a lover –

Nor would I ever even want to read about such activities again, unless, of course, it was purely for the purposes of research –

I was certainly all in favor of sober, consenting adults doing whatever made them happy. And, as a highly functioning pothead with a full course load, straight A’s and two part-time jobs, I felt up to the challenge of embodying Pat Califia for a morning and giving a talk on my right to practice bdsm as well as my reasons for producing and consuming hardcore pornography to my high school women studies class.

It was my first time speaking publicly about sex. It was not to be my last.

I kept it clean. I didn’t even make mention of a whip collection, but I had everyone’s attention. Ms. Pendergast seemed a bit disturbed about my defense of pornography, but I thought maybe she was playing devil’s advocate. A lively discussion ensued about the differences between pornography and erotica, and at the end, during the question and answer period, when Dean Scholl who was a total know-it-all and one of the only guys in the class put up his hand to ask “WHAT is the difference between what you and your lovers do, and abuse?!” I answered, as breezily and confidently as Pat Califia herself: “Dean. It’s all about consent.”

The bell rang and everyone packed up for lunch, but Ms. Pendergast asked me to stay behind. She was steaming mad, pacing like an enraged beast – this was definitely bad pacing. I’d never seen this before. She told me that I could have gotten her fired, that the office administration could have been listening (at this point, she gestured vaguely, yet dramatically, towards the intercom in the corner) and that I should have been responsible enough to have warned her about the content of my presentation.

“I would have censored some of that,” she said, nodding vigorously “yes – yes, I would have.”

With those words, she slid off the pedestal I had made for her, fell to the ground in an ungainly heap, and then scrambled to her feet to stand and glare me. There was an almost audible crack as my

young heart snapped in half – broken by the incapable realization that my beloved Ms. Pendergast was one of those anti-porn feminists! ... She probably liked Andrea Dworkin!

I apologized for upsetting her and left, dejected. The next day I received a B for my presentation. “You talked a little too quickly” was her written comment.

Now I was pissed off. This was clearly a reflection of her aversion to my opinions – and wasn’t this an example of hegemony? Shouldn’t there be more room for more than one flavour of feminism in the classroom?

The written component of the final assignment was to be a description of our thinker’s contributions to feminism. I gave it my all. I illustrated the links between repressive sexual policies and restricted access to sex education, birth control and abortion. I made reference to the life-affirming impact of gay sexual imagery, be it erotica or porn, for queers desperate for visible and positive affirmation of their sexualities. I pointed out the disproportionate percentage of queer and feminist material still being seized by Canada customs as it protects us from obscenity. And I asked: who has the right to deny or define someone else’s pleasure, if it involves consenting adults?

Her written response to my written report was short: she gave me an A, and scribbled across the top of the page “you’ve challenged some of my views.” And although I mourned the end of Ms. Pendergast’s pedestal almost as much as I mourned the end of the class, I decided to be satisfied with that.

That was the only time I had her as a teacher, but we continued to greet each other and chat in the hallways, and almost two years later, when the Harris conservatives were pushing through the omnibus Bill 160, which gutted educational funding, made strikes illegal for teachers, and banned any elected school trustee from voting against government policy, when every teacher in Ontario went on strike for two weeks in January, I went to school each day to walk the picket line, shouldering my own sign in knee deep snow in ten below, bringing

my teachers cocoa at 7:30 in the morning when they started their slow circuits around the block waving to passing motorists.


I didn’t do this for higher grades, I was two weeks away from graduation, in fact, as long as the strike went on I couldn’t finish, couldn’t board a plane to escape to an island on the west coast, far from my father, conditioned by patriarchy to be a bully.

No, I supported the teacher’s strike because people like Valerie Pendergast and Pat Califia had encouraged me to do what I could to make the world a better place, where people were more

likely to like themselves.

I supported them because I still loved my women studies teacher, because one day as we walked and talked and she was on a rant about how John Snobelen, the education minister, kept referring to education as a product to be bought and sold and so clearly he did not value education – she broke off to point out with pleasure a flock of pigeons tilting and arcing through the air with the sun gleaming for a soft golden moment on their bellies as they passed overhead. And in that moment, the birds were just as important to her as the strike.

Now I was pissed off. This was clearly a reflection of her aversion to my opinions – and wasn’t this an example of hegemony? Shouldn’t there be more room for more than one flavour of feminism in the classroom?

I think that what she always worked for was a world which would let us love ourselves well. That was the goal of her feminist thought. I’ve not spoken to her since my last day of class in February 1998. Maybe we’ve less in common now than we did back then, but I reckon that her feminism and mine have space for difference as well as discussion – maybe best kept out of earshot of high school administrations! – but I think there’s room for the Pat Califias and the Valerie Pendergasts, yes and maybe even some Andrea Dworkins, and I think that if I were to go back one day, meet her for tea on Princess Street, I think she’d be pleased. 

LEFT Some Purple Thistle organizers on the go. Photo by Sylvia

Doing it Together:

Youth Liberation & Deschooling

An interview with **Carla Bergman** by Nick Montgomery

CARLA BERGMAN IS A COMMUNITY ARTIST, CURATOR and writer who mucks around with her partner and two unschooling kids in East Vancouver, unceded Coast Salish Territories. Currently, she is the director of the Purple Thistle Centre and has worked with youth creating projects, mentoring, facilitating workshops and making a variety of publications for the past fifteen years. She is on the Board of the Institute for Anarchist Studies. Carla co-founded the art and activist publication RAIN, worked with car free day Vancouver as a core organizer and co-founded the Thistle Institute, an alternative to university, in 2011. She is currently working on a Film about the Thistle and Youth Liberation, to be completed late 2014. She was one of the editors of the AK Press book: Stay Solid: A Radical Handbook For Youth.

NM: You really center trust when you talk about youth liberation and oppression—why?

cb: John Holt has a great quote about this: “Trust children. Nothing could be more simple -- or more difficult. Difficult, because to trust children we must trust ourselves—and most of us were taught as children that we could not be trusted.”

I think that kids start off their lives trusting everyone around them; it's how they learn from others and how they receive love. And then, over

time it often gets eroded... I don't think it's because they learn to distrust, indeed that does happen, but I think it begins with not being trusted. It's obvious that a largely accepted notion in society is that kids are not to be trusted. I think this is one of the most damaging and brutal forms of discrimination against kids and youth.

I think trust happens in all kinds of subtle ways, and it's relational. I can use the Thistle¹ as an example of how it might look in the most obvious, concrete way. One thing that separates the Thistle from many other youth projects is that the youth on the collective each have keys to the space and are free to use them anytime. The youth don't have to go through some big formal interview process, or sign over their life; we just ask that if they are new to the space to hang out a bit and get to know us first, and sometimes, you get the keys on your first night there. This contributes to a wonderful environment of shared trust and kindness—a space filled with friendship.

Trust is one of the most important foundations for all relationships and communities, and if we are not trusting our kids, the most vulnerable folks in our communities, then we are setting up to fail as radical inclusive humans.



NM: You've talked about how power relations between kids and adults can't just be flattened out or eliminated--can you say more about that?

cb: I always say, and it's deeply sincere, that it has been through the act of parenting that I have been truly radicalized. As anti-authoritarians we have to ask ourselves: how do kids fit into our praxis? I am put to test every single day to not oppress my kids. As one of the adults in my house I hold almost all the power and it's good, fucking hard work figuring out how to be solid, how to be a mentor, and how to have a thriving life as well. For me this isn't about just being permissive and nice, because as parents we can do all kinds of fucked up manipulation and oppression with a gentle sweet smile on our faces.

So, we always say that we strive to be a relationship/family centered home. I see that as an alternative to centering kids, which I think can lead adults into the fantasy that we've checked our power at the door, and that it's all good. It's not that easy. I come to every single day with my kids with years of socialization and fuckedupness. It's deeply embedded and nuanced, and it takes care and dedication to unlearn and to do well. Mistakes happen, a lot. But those are OK too, because we show our kids that we're not some god(dess) on a pedestal really early on and more than that, we show them that humans make mistakes, and in fact it's how we learn. I think of my relationships with my kids (and all the young

folks in our lives) as relationships that matter and that means I don't take it for granted that we're friends just because I say so. I have to work at it, as I would with any good pal. I think solidarity begins at home -- we need to be solid, kind, and caring there if we're going to try to extend those values to the broader world.

NM: You have a militant stand against schools and schooling, and people assume this means you won't work with anyone involved in the school system, but your stance is a lot more nuanced. Can you explain how you think about this?

cb: My stance is that I am a strong supporter of folks who are school resisters, because folks who resist compulsory schooling (and all its problems) have in almost every case centered kids as a group that deserve liberation. I can really get behind that and I'm passionate about it.

I think it's also important to emphasize that youth and compulsory schooling are not isolated from the rest of society, so I think it's imperative to look at the entire system and how school and youth oppression fits into the entire dominant culture pie and how it intersects into all forms of oppression. For example, when you add

if we are not trusting our kids, the most vulnerable folks in our communities, then we are setting up to fail as radical inclusive humans.

capitalism, work, class, race, patriarchy, colonialism and all the rest into the mix, it's really clear that the situation is complex and there isn't room for simple black-and-white judgments. The bottom line is that most parents/caregivers have to work and so kids need some care, some place to be. In many places around the world it is illegal to homeschool/unschool and it's a criminal act to leave your kids at home alone in many places. Just a few weeks ago in the US, a single mom was put in jail because her 9 year old was at the park alone. With all this in mind, I support all movements and struggles of resistance and reform when it comes to creating better conditions for kids and that includes movements to make schools less fucked up places. Most schools are places that warehouse kids and oppress them in terrible ways. At the same time, I have nothing but mad respect for those folks who tirelessly and passionately show up to these institutions daily to support kids and to try and make it better for them.

Ultimately, my personal work and activism is about creating alternatives to school, so I am less interested in the binary between school or no school and more interested in rethinking entirely how we can create free, accessible spaces and projects for and by youth. I want to challenge the conditions that underscore youth oppression by having our communities sincerely engage kids into the architecture of all areas of society, and that's going to mean directly challenging ageism against children and youth. It's worth emphasizing that most folks don't even include youth oppression (childism) on their list of oppressions. We have lots of work to do, and it's going to have to be together and it's going to have to be lead by youth.

NM: Where do you think radical pedagogy and critiques of education go wrong?

cb: In lots of cases, critiques or new models of education or of pedagogies can replicate the same kind of ageism and hatred of kids that happens in conventional institutions. If we don't begin from a sincere place of believing that kids deserve the same respect and treatment we'd give any other adult then we are doomed to repeat shitty forms of aggression and oppression.

The equation of learning to education is the crux of the problem; I like to center the idea that kids are learning all the time, and that we can all learn by doing. This isn't a new idea; Tolstoy wrote about it during the rise of modern schooling over 150 years ago. I started using the #checkyourpedagogy hashtag on twitter because I have noticed that a lot of radicals are still thinking about kids as empty vessels that need to be taught everything. The problem I see a lot is that critical and radical pedagogy methods don't really get to the heart of the problem (childism) and so the practice is often condescending and comes from a place that assumes youth need to be radicalized, or educated about social justice.

I think really sharing power and being sincere about youth liberation means never being attached to an outcome, and most pedagogies are all about an outcome that connects back to the teacher's plans. This is where deschooling can come in. To me deschooling just means having horizontal and friendly relationships between learner and mentor -- centering relationships. When it's going well, learning and sharing knowledge moves in all directions, sideways, up and down. It's organic, relationship-based, fluid and deeply nuanced. This may seem super obvious, but the reality is that our entire education system is based on the opposite of that, it's basically just one direction: going down — expert to beginner.

The Thistle project (all the classes, workshops, the buying of supplies, etc) is run by a crew of youth, yet somehow the youth at the Thistle are not seen as folks who can teach anything about organizing, or share the skills that they mentor at the centre. I can't tell you how many times I hear from well-meaning adults wanting to teach the Thistle youth this and that about organizing. In contrast, other than silkscreening, we rarely receive an email asking the youth to come share their knowledge on running a dynamic and vibrant project. That sucks, right?

It really points to how undervalued their work and knowledge is. I think it's probably a (shitty) normal response because it's coming from an internal ageist place of "isn't that sweet, the kids practicing organizing!" I often have to point to all the failed adult-run projects around town just to show that it's ageist to think the youth at the Thistle aren't

I want to challenge the conditions that underscore youth oppression by having our communities sincerely engage kids into the architecture of all areas of society.

fucking kicking some serious ass at organizing! I think there are clear parallels with the ways other oppressions play out, like the ways that women's work and knowledge gets systematically marginalized and discounted.

NM: How can folks learn more about deschooling and youth liberation?

cb: I say just get busy doing it, get out there and engage with kids, learn together, make shit and have fun! And don't worry too much if you don't know what to do, or how to do it well--just be a good person, follow their curiosity, be open and listen lots! I am constantly learning how to do this work. I fuck up more than I care to admit and I am always learning and sometimes that happens from witnessing other adults do it well, but mostly that learning comes from the kindness of younger folks meeting me where I am at and letting me stumble and learn from experiencing alongside them.

I like to turn to folks like Tolstoy or Emma Goldman -- both were staunch critics of compulsory schooling -- to emphasize the point that people have been resisting, criticizing, and creating alternatives to modern factory schooling since its inception. I think that's important to realize and to remember. Resisting schooling/schools, or trying to rethink how we can live better with the youngest folks in our lives is not a privileged act: it's a sincere attempt to understand fully what school is about, who it is benefiting and more than that, who it is hurting. Modern schooling is steeped in colonial and capitalist logic and deeply oppressive to children, and there's a long history and vibrant legacy of resistance to the dominant models of education. If it is something you're interested in researching there are lots of books written about school resistance and

I am less interested in the binary between school or no school and more interested in rethinking entirely how we can create free, accessible spaces and projects for and by youth.

the problems with compulsory schooling. There are also tons of resources on how to create the alternatives. The core folks I turn to are Ivan Illich (critic of institutions, including schooling), John Holt (founder the term unschooling and creator of alternatives to school), and a super popular book, primarily for youth, is by Grace Llewellyn called: *The Teenage Liberation Handbook: How to Quit School and Get a Real Life and Education*. A terrific go-to reader edited by Matt Hern, *Everywhere All the Time*, is definitely worth a read and includes a lot of youth voices. There are also tons of free resources online, and so many brilliant projects all over the world. I'd suggest doing a quick online search with keywords like: deschooling, school resistance, youth liberation, free schools and unschooling and you'll find great stuff. [△](#)

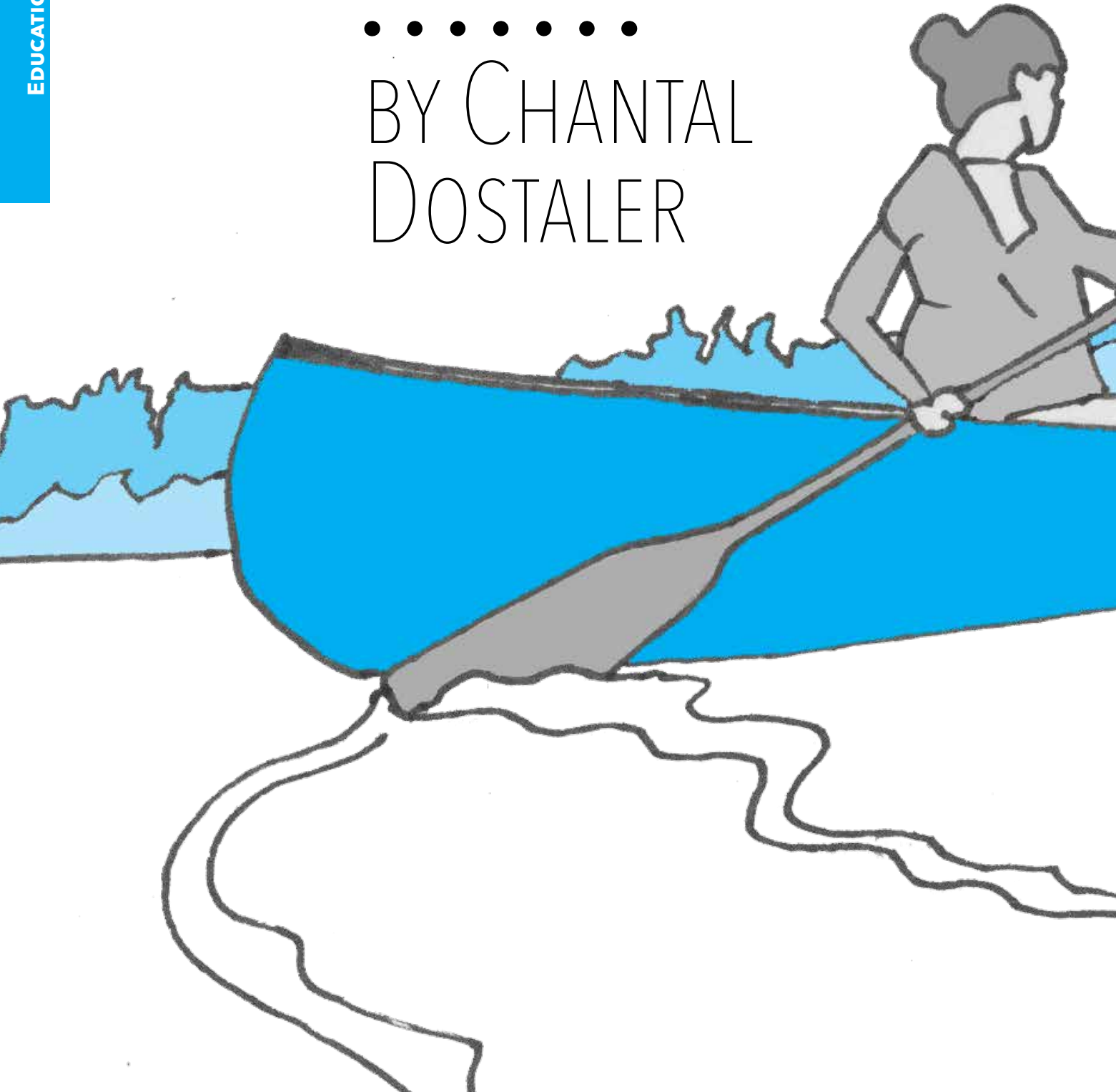
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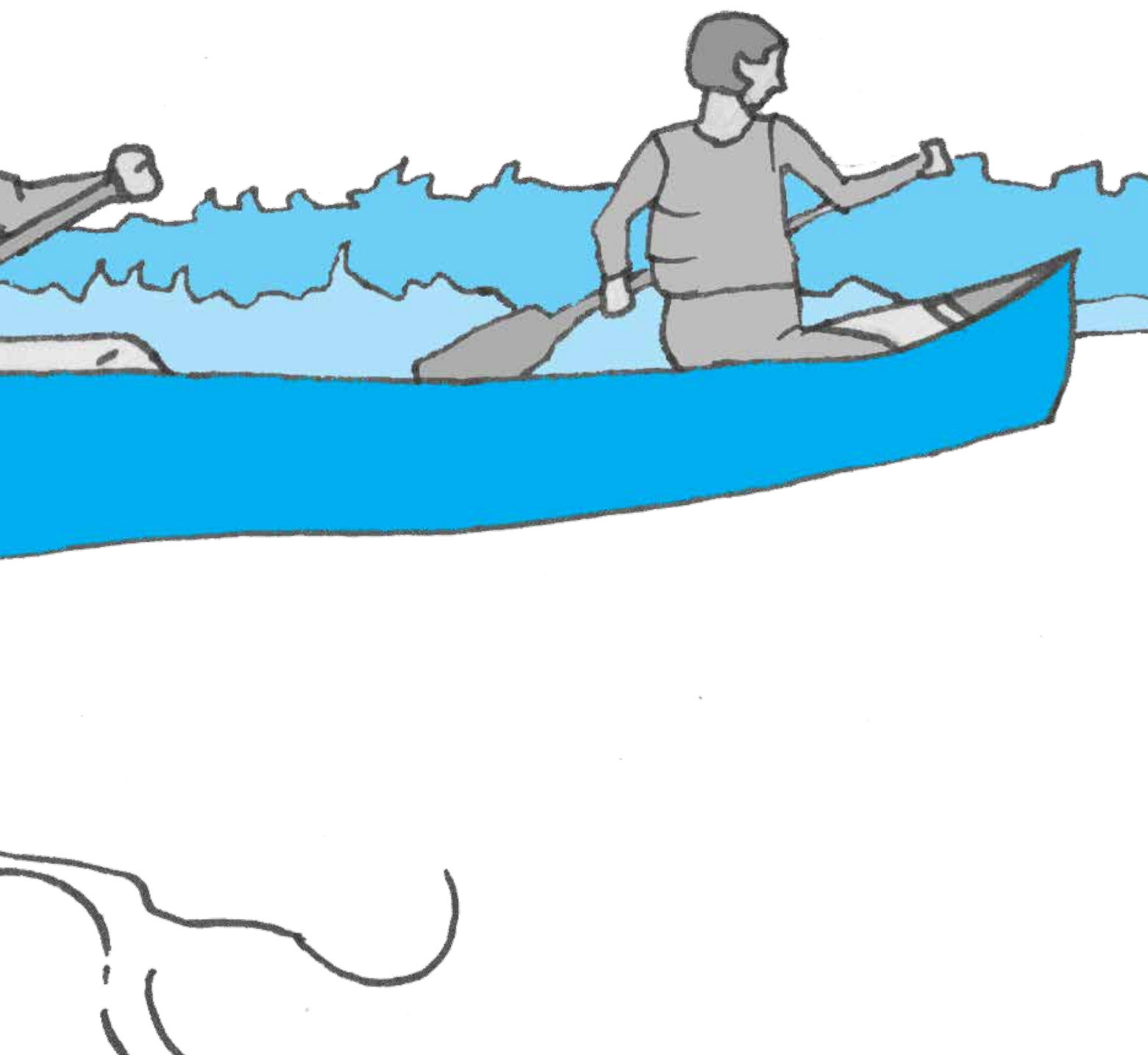


[The Purple Thistle Centre](#) is a youth-run arts and activist space in East Vancouver, Coast Salish territories.

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NOBODY'S GOOD AT
EVERYTHING BUT EVERYBODY
IS GOOD AT SOMETHING

• • • • •
BY CHANTAL
DOSTALER





TODAY'S EDUCATION SYSTEM HAS MANY flaws, namely that everyone gets taught the same things in a way which attempts to mold students into perfect folks for the workforce. The student to teacher ratio is so high, there is no time or space to cater to every student's needs. There are of course exceptions. The teachers we remember are the ones who took extra time to help us, who motivated and inspired us. They worked outside of their contractual obligations to make sure we were getting the attention and care we needed for our knowledge to grow. They took the extra time to ensure the success of the student. The special teacher I remember always had a way to make me feel like it was okay to ask questions when I was unsure, they helped to point me in the right direction. They would sometimes take time to change their teaching method just so I would understand. Like a mentor would do.

MENTORING IS AN ART

I had a handful of people mentor me during my first career as a monitor technician/sound engineer. One summer, wanting a break from everything I applied for an apprenticeship in a wilderness survival group. Much like a job, there was a formal screening process and interview which I passed. But after that, everything was very informal.

We are 5 steps into a portage walking in the north western part of Algonquin when suddenly he stops.

"Oh look! Wow, look at that!" Mentor is looking up at the trees.

What is he looking at? I don't see anything.

"Oh, it's all around here." He gets real close to a Balsam Fir and observes it for a moment. He reaches up and invites me to come take a look.

"Look at this!" He hands me a long brown hair. While I'm standing there looking at it, wondering how he saw this in what I thought was a bunch of trees, Mentor looks down and concentrates on the dirt. Like a dog to a scent trail he starts walking.

"I wonder what it was digging for..." What was it looking for? I ask myself as I follow the leader.

"Come, let's find out!" We get on our knees and look.

"Here," He hands me a blueberry and takes one for himself.

"snacks!"

Sometimes it takes an outside perspective to even take notice of a gift in a person, to boost a child's confidence by admiring their work, whatever it may be. With the right kind of support a person will thrive. But if gifts aren't tended to, if a person is not encouraged, they may lack the confidence to carry forward.

My mentor showed me the very basics of everything I know today about the wilderness. I would go out and try techniques and new skills for myself and come back with so many questions. At first he would answer, but as the weeks rolled on, I noticed there would be a particular smirk to his face. My mentor would listen to my thoughts about these findings and ask great questions; Encouraging me to track the scene, to sit and watch, to read up on behaviours. Sometimes were certain things were way out of my league but most of the time he would ask me something that would make me think twice and go look for answers. Sometimes he would come with me into the wild in my hunt for knowledge. He would smile and nod to our findings. He would never tell me if I was wrong, but he may have advised another option (unless it posed an immediate danger, then he would let me know). We got to know each other in a close student-teacher relationship which helped him create challenges that catered to my needs as a student.

"Mentoring is to support and encourage people to manage their own learning in order that they may maximize their potential, develop their skills, improve their performance and become the person they want to be."

-Eric Parsloe, *The Oxford School of Coaching & Mentoring*

When I am asked if I would will go through college again, I say no, not right now anyway. That is because most of what I know now was not learned in school. There are two basic reasons for my successes: people who have taken the time to show me what they know and my passion and willingness to learn.

COMMUNITY

I believe education takes a community. This belief is based on the fact that one can learn from anyone: A person is never done learning. The youngest child may say something that makes you have to stop and think. I believe it takes a rich community of various people from which we can learn from. What's important is that we are guided through our trials and learn from the process. In community, a person's skill will get noticed and those who are more advanced in this skill may take them under their wing and show them what they know. This benefits the person receiving the mentoring, as well as the community as a whole. There is profound virtue in community. Without it, we lack the opportunity to listen to our elders, to play with children, to speak with adults, to earn responsibility. We may be unaware of our gifts and how to apply them in service to the people we appreciate and we care for. This in turn reflects on the ability to honour ourselves.

Sometimes it takes an outside perspective to even take notice of a gift in a person, to boost a child's confidence by admiring their work, whatever it may be. With the right kind of support a person will thrive. But if gifts aren't tended to, if a person is not encouraged, they may lack the confidence to carry forward. If not praised, they may not be able to even recognize their own potential. If not pushed to the edge, they may never know how to fly.

When you are good at what you do and you love it you probably want to talk about it all day. If you should meet someone (formal or informal) passionate but with less experience, you probably wouldn't mind showing them a thing or two. That's how a Mentor/Apprentice relationship starts.

These days I am a contracted wilderness guide. The responsibilities of my job are, first and foremost, to make sure people are safe in an environment that may be foreign to them. I need to watch, make sure they are eating well and staying hydrated. I make use of my judgment and shape the experience around people's level of experience, fitness and comfort. I need to be able to make a call to stop if things get tough (after all you can't control the weather). What makes me different than other guides who studied outdoor education is my intention to facilitate nature connection. In my mind there is an extra duty that comes with my job title: To plant a seed.

In the short amount of time I have with guests, I try to create an open space. The memories created will no doubt last a lifetime and I'd like for all of us to get the most out of it as possible. I will always ask about areas of interest and levels of experience before the trip but I do try to listen and get a feel for guests. It is not hard for people to tell you their goals and dreams but it is hard to get people to share their weaknesses and fears. By putting it out there, I find it is easier to remember that what may be easy to me might seem impossible to others. What could be considered old news to me could be fascinating and new to others. The simplest of things can become teachable moments. The only fair way to approach these moments are with awe and wonder like it was your own first time as well. This time, you can share a bit of information and hopefully foster a curiosity.

I believe, part of my duty as a guide is to welcome people into my fascination and awe of the natural world, and foster an awareness that the natural world is all around us, no matter where we are from. No matter how old, I want us to play. I want them to reach into the water and feel this gooey clear thing full of... what is that? Relish in the tastiness of the spruce tips on toast. Be tired because on our journey,

we were met with winds that came out of nowhere. Watch the fireflies dance above their heads as they get sung to sleep by the cries of the Loon. I'd like them to dream sweet vivid dreams thanks to the Sweet Gale we harvested by the shore for our evening tea and think of all of those that were here before us. I try my best to mentor them as my mentor did with me. I carry about fifteen books about numerous topics while on trip. During meal preparation I encourage people to pick up these books and look up information about something we talked about, sometimes I know the answer but other times it is for my own curiosity. It is all with the intention of taking matters into our own hands. My goal is not only to leave people wanting more, but to show them that they are able to take education into their own hands after we've said our farewells.

There comes a time when the mentor who has helped you become closer to the

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best you can be will send you out into the world. When you have learned everything you can, and your mentor trusts that it's time for you to take matters into your own, you will walk differently. Seeing someone you trust, trust that you will do just fine sure gives you an extra boost of confidence.

Today's life's burdens take over and we try to fit the mold. There's pressure to make decisions in a haste with no leeway to change one's mind. We cannot take our time to learn as everything has a fixed due date. Everyone is trying to be on top and there is always someone there to take your place if you should slip. There is no room

to learn from our mistakes.

Most of what I know best is from mistakes I have made in the process. My mistakes made me human. My mistakes made me humble. In humility I have learned not to be quick to judge people but to sit back and listen and maybe lend a few helpful shoves towards the right direction. Taking a negative judgment and modifying it into a positive one; whether or not I should give the answer or ask the question differently.

It is really hard to break out from (the idea of) academic education because there is no security in alternate education. There is no certificate to prove one's dedication. But there is a security in knowing that those who have taken you under their wing will always be there for you, what you have gained is more than a certification, you have someone you can rely on. You will have gained confidence that others will pick up on and want you to be part of their team. Experiential education not theoretical education: Knowledge you can back up with experience, not knowledge gained from books written by people you will never meet, or from teachers that may not even be able to put a face to a name. While choosing to apprentice, you have gained "real world" knowledge, a mentor and a friend.

With alternate education there is a sense of fulfillment, humility and trust. I trust that everybody has something they can teach me and maybe I can help them learn a thing or two, as well.

I would recommend finding a mentor before signing up for academic school. It's affordable, the curriculum is flexible and it's an amazing way to learn. Share the knowledge. When it's your time, don't forget to pay it forward. Remember:

The best teachers know that they themselves are students. As knowledge grows deeper, so do the follow up questions. As a teacher you must be able to ask questions not looking for answers but for conversation. After all, a person is never done learning. △

Towards a Holistic Learning Environment

by Allison Parker

"Conventional classrooms... are taking kids out of the natural world and putting them in small cubes... with all outdoor smells, sounds, feelings, all cut out; they are learning in a vacuum"

- Chris Green

SITUATED JUST OFF OF THE ERAMOSA RIVER, SURROUNDED by cedars and grassy meadows, where insects and bird sounds fill the air, you can find the Guelph Outdoor School (GOS). A program developed by educator and mentor Chris Green, the GOS began in the fall of 2012 as a way for kids between the ages of 7 to 14 years old to learn outside of the conventional classroom. Currently, the GOS offers two programs: a Goslings program for primary school kids ages 4 to 7 years old and a Foxes and Wolves program for kids aged 7 to 14 years old. While programming activities differ between the age groups, a similarity they share is a low facilitator-to-child ratio (3:1), which allows learning to occur on a one to one basis.

For many in the world today, education is viewed in tandem with formal schooling. There is a widely held belief that formal schooling is best able to prepare every new generation to the needs of the present and future, in short, that it is the basis for the continuation of this society. Even amongst those who choose to educate from home, the majority still follow a standardized curriculum developed through provincial or other state guidelines. Hierarchical learning structures, in our culture, are deemed as legitimate.

Yet in North America, each year more young people are being told that they suffer from attention disorders and behavioural issues. Rather than critiquing the systemic framework of education, the blame is placed on the individual, the family, or genetic disposition.

Learning is highly multifaceted; it incorporates all of our senses. When the primary focus of education is the pursuit of knowledge, we have to ask ourselves, what parts of ourselves are we under developing?

In contrast to a conventional classroom where learning is compartmentalized by class and rigid time schedules, the outdoor school focuses on developing a more holistic model, one based on cycles of learning and mentorship. Rather than learning in a strictly didactic context, one of the outdoor school's methods is based upon kids performing their own inquiry with guided questions by the facilitator. Through a combination of inspiration, creativity, guidance and focused work, kids are absorbing knowledge in a way that is fun and inquisitive, but that also allows space to be energetic, playful and young.

Envisioning it as an alternative option to the conventional method of didactic learning, Chris hopes through outdoor school to create a nature connected culture by placing emphasis on building deep, powerful and lasting connections between kids and our local land base. When we nurture relationships to the natural world early in life, the desire is for those feelings to really sink in and become a part of our lives, so that as we grow, our choices reflect the values we have developed.

While the outdoor school does not follow a provincial curriculum, it does use an education manual called "The Coyotes Guide to Connecting With Nature" which incorporates exercises, nature based challenges, and games that work to develop



and foster certain attributes that ultimately create more emotionally stable, happy and resilient people, and allows kids to meet a wide variety of challenges.

One of the attributes that the Outdoor School tries to foster is called quiet mind, which becomes a base on which to build other learning. Quiet mind is developed by sitting outside for at least twenty minutes, still, looking and tuning into what is happening around you, listening to bird language, your breath, the direction of wind. In general, quiet mind tries to calm the endless racings of thoughts that are in our heads every minute and to open our minds and hearts to something new.

Games are often the most effective way of teaching. At outdoor school, sensory games can be tools to develop a greater awareness of surrounding, knowledge of self and compassion for others. Many sensory games involve minimizing one of the senses to heighten another. Sneaking up on someone who is blindfolded for example, necessitates the developing of acute hearing and focus for those under the fold, and the body control, patience and awareness of surrounding for those doing the sneaking.


Outdoor School incorporates three types of activities; primitive skill building, nature based challenges and the art of questioning. Daily activities include learning to build matchless fires and collect raw materials, animal tracking and identification, reading maps and engaging with the natural environment through questions. Ultimately the goals are to connect kids with themselves, connect them to each other and connect them with nature.

Chris and the other mentors at the Guelph Outdoor School are trying to create a culture shift without explicitly saying how to create that change.

The idea behind this is that kids grow up, and if they can start developing a connection in their own heart and minds, they are going to be more likely to manifest it in a way that is appropriate for their time.

Many kids that come to the Outdoor School are homeschooled, struggle with traditional classroom structure or are there because their parents consider it an important part of rounding out their education. A lot of parents take Outdoor School and work it into the IEP's – Individual Education Plans.

The response has been great: for the families that come the parents are just thrilled. Parents will often report that their kids are more peaceful, at ease and less likely to lash out and experience anxiety. Time spent outdoors usually means a more pronounced sense of peace, and quiet mind.

Culture shift requires patience and dedication. As mentors, it is important to recognize that everybody has their own edge: the edge of their knowledge, physical comfort, risk taking, social comfort and abilities. When you can identify where kids are coming up at their edges and create experiences where they just barely step beyond that. Now that edge is at a new spot, maybe just a baby step away, but that's okay because the idea is that we are in this for the long haul. 

To learn more about the Guelph Outdoor School, you can find lots of details on their website:
www.theguelphoutdoorschool.com



School as the First System of Oppression

by Anita Fernandez

Content Warning: contains physical and institutional violence

THIS IS A REPRESSED MEMORY BECAUSE I CAN NOT recall it no matter how much I try. In kindergarten in Toronto I was beaten by my teacher. My mother remembers going to the school to complain about it, not that it did much good. We moved away to Brampton but the oppressive experiences did not stop. As children of Hispanic, working-class immigrants our intelligence and abilities were always looked at with doubt. We were put in a special ed[ucation] class for a while because the school administrators believed we could not read. In reality, I had taught myself to read in English just by picking up books from the shelves in libraries and classrooms. At home I was teaching my youngest brother to read.

We briefly moved to Chile with my mom and upon returning, I came back to a harsh working-class school to finish grade eight where I was routinely made fun of by a group of blonde girls.

Following middle school, I was accepted into a prestigious art school filled with upper middle-class, white kids. Although I did not have the words at that time, I felt inside how oppressive the school environment was, I felt it instinctually. As a hispanic, working-class female I quickly realized that my body and therefore my mind was one of the least valued in the classroom. I was constantly being told by teachers told me to be silent, one man even told me that I “had a chip on my shoulder”. Everyone was telling me that what was “wrong” with me was just me, it was not the system, it was not the negative feedback I kept receiving.

I was made to go see a therapist every week, this man told me to “just take Paxil”. I neglected to take his advice but still I absorbed the information that I was the only one with a “problem”. It is said that depression is anger turned inward and I can believe that.

I did not realize it at the time but school is closely linked to the prison and mental health systems. One day in grade twelve, at an “alternative” school (I had been kicked out of the art school for insubordination) a teacher called the police because I was crying. I was forced into the vehicle and taken to a hospital. It was one of the worst days of my life and my introduction into another oppressive institution. At the hospital I was abused, stripped

of my dignity (as well as clothing) and drugged. When my parents came to pick me up they had to convince the doctor that I was not “psychotic” as the teachers had described me. At home, I took a shower and cried. At school, my “peers” blamed me for this traumatic experience. No sympathy for the devil, even though the devil in this case was a confused and isolated teenaged girl.

I have never shared this story before because it still causes me great pain. I do wish I had never stepped foot inside a school building. It killed my curiosity and love of learning and art for many years. But now, after learning so much on my own I realize school is just one of the tools that society uses to oppress the population. It is a tool that keeps the working class ignorant and content with being an obedient wage slave. What do we learn of our own history? What do we learn about class struggle? What do we learn about Canada as a “nation” built on stolen native land and genocide? Nothing. Absolutely nothing.

But we do get standardized tests, exams and compulsory volunteering; to teach students to regurgitate information, not critically examine the knowledge they are receiving. May the best robot win. If you are “good”, obedient, and follow every rule and every order given by the “authorities” you will be a great student. If you learn to parrot the conservative values and “facts” that they teach, you will do fine.

If I have children, I don’t think I could subject them to this form of torture and brainwashing. Will I be ordered to put them on Ritalin because they are too “unruly” (in other words, they have minds of their own)? What is the solution to schooling as it exists today? We need to come up with a real alternative to schools and universities. People need to take charge of their own education otherwise the state and corporations will do it for us. It is obvious to me, that they have their own interests and anyone who dares to question even an insignificant rule is in direct opposition to their agenda. Can we make a different school? Can we save the most marginalized kids from abuse, depression and suicide? I would like to hope so. [△](#)

RIGHT River Run march takes over Toronto streets.

FOLLOWING PAGES Quik Trip burns on the first of twelve consecutive nights of rioting in Ferguson, MO; Photo's from two occupations of Enbridge Line 9 sites.

Fall News Briefs:

July 11th to August 19th, 2014

By Bryan Hill, e.war, Amber Holland & Peggy Karamazov

JULY 13

Gaza Strip: Israel reported over 1,300 deadly air strikes on Gaza since the newest escalation of the Israel-Palestine conflict which began July 8th.

JULY 18

Olympia, WA: Anarchists slashed tires and sprayed brake fluid on new cars at a Nissan dealership, causing \$100,000 in damage. In the accompanying communiqué, they claimed the action was in solidarity with the 5E three, who are anarchists imprisoned in Mexico for allegedly burning a car at a Nissan dealership.

JULY 21

Coast Salish Territory (Vancouver, BC): Homeless individuals, and those calling to an end to homelessness, set up a camp in a Downtown Eastside park. They were given an eviction notice by the city of Vancouver. In response, First Nations individuals sent out an eviction notice to the City of Vancouver.

JULY 23

Clyde River/Kanngiqtuqaapik, Nunavut: More than 300 people in the small Baffin Island community took to the streets in protest of proposed seismic testing off the eastern shore of Baffin Island, stating it is very harmful to marine life. There are only

1,000 people who live in Clyde River and nearly one third of them turned up to the demonstration.

JULY 24

Unist'ot'en Territory, BC: Residents of the Unist'ot'en Camp evicted a crew conducting studies for TransCanada's Coastal GasLink Pipeline Project from their unceded territory. The crew was warned that their equipment would be confiscated if they returned.

JULY 29

Mi'kmaq Territory (Rexton, NB): After over nine months in custody and an extended seven month trial, Mi'kmaq Warrior Society members Germaine 'Junior' Breau and Aaron Francis were sentenced for their involvement in resisting an RCMP raid of an anti-shale gas encampment near Rexton, New Brunswick in October last year. Judge Jackson sentenced both Breau and Francis to 15 months in prison, meaning that with pre-custody detainment both men will be reunited with their families and communities in a matter of weeks.

JULY 31

Mississauga Territory (Toronto, ON): Members of the Grassy Narrows First Nation and their supporters rallied in

Toronto for River Run, an annual event that puts pressure on the provincial government to address the decades-long impacts of mercury poisoning in the Wabigoon-English River system. This year, the federal government has approved clear-cutting parts of Grassy Narrows traditional territory, a practice which can exacerbate the effects of mercury contamination.

AUGUST 2

Tsawout Territory (Salt Spring Island, BC): About 30 boaters blockaded the main dock on the islet, preventing workers from getting to the job site and prompted a warning from the RCMP. They were there to protest the building of a luxury home over a First Nations burial ground on Grace Islet.

AUGUST 5

Deshkaan Ziibing, Anishinabek Territory, (Innerkip, ON): In the early morning individuals from affected communities throughout south-western Ontario interrupted work on a section of Enbridge's Line 9 pipeline. Individuals proceeded to make camp, calling themselves #damline9.

HUGE UPRISING IN FERGUSON, MISSOURI

AUGUST 9

Ferguson, Missouri: Within five minutes of police stopping two eighteen year-old black men for jaywalking, Michael Brown was killed after being shot six times. Ferguson is a majority-black suburb of St. Louis, Missouri and policed by a largely white police force.

SUNDAY AUGUST 10

St. Louis Police Chief Joe Belmar held a news conference where he admitted that Brown was unarmed when he was killed.

In the evening, a candle lit vigil was held at the site of the killing. The neighbourhood turned out in numbers and as the vigil winded down, the crowd surrounded three police cruisers and smashed their windows.

A dozen businesses were looted for toilet paper, food, alcohol and an ATM machine, including the Quik Trip convenience store that Brown was walking towards when he was killed. The Quik Trip was burnt later that night. Graffiti reading 'Avenge Mike Mike', 'Fuck Da Police', and 'Kill Cops' littered the walls. Thirty people were arrested and two police officers were injured when the crowd fought back.

MONDAY AUGUST 11

A number of death threats were issued against the Ferguson Police Department and the cop who killed Michael Brown. Hackers disabled City of Ferguson website. A demonstration is held outside the FPD and police arrest seven people. The FBI announced an investigation into Brown's death.

By 8PM, a sizeable crowd gathered at the site of his death and the police, in military vehicles and with assault rifles and snipers, attempted to disperse the crowd with tear gas. Street fighting with the police takes place into the night, and police attack with tear gas. Fifteen people were arrested.



AUGUST 7

Mississauga territory (Toronto, ON): Individuals confronted and shut down reactionary Men's Rights Activists (MRAs) as they gathered to spread their message of misogyny this past Tuesday at the University of Toronto.

AUGUST 9

Ferguson, Missouri: An unarmed black teenager, Michael Brown was killed by a white police officer. Initial autopsy report stated that Michael was shot at six times, including twice in the head.

AUGUST 10

Deshkaan Ziibing, Anishinabek Territory, (Innerkip, ON): An injunction was served at the #damline9 occupation site. Two individuals locked themselves to two concrete filled metal drums. Two other support people who were told they would not be arrested, were arrested. The folks locked down, after being hammer drilled out, were also arrested.

AUGUST 10

Halifax, Nova Scotia: To mark the 40th Prison Justice Day some anarchists dropped a banner of a rotary overpass reading: 'Abolish Prisons', and further stated in a communique, "...we believe there is only one solution that will permanently

address these problems: the abolition of prisons on one hand, and the abolition of the white supremacist patriarchal capitalist order that extends the logic of the prison throughout society on the other."

AUGUST 12

Asubpeeschoseewagong Territory (Kenora, ON): Anishinaabeg disrupt a TransCanada presentation in Kenora, Ontario. Anishinaabeg and fellow Energy East pipeline resisters made a presence inside and outside Lakeside Inn for TransCanada's second open house in Kenora. Elders and young people were present, holding signs and speaking to attendees.

AUGUST 13

Neskonlith Territory (Okanagan, BC): A First Nations band in British Columbia issued an eviction notice to the company that owns the Mount Polley tailings pond, which spilled millions of cubic metres of waste in the Cariboo region. The Neskonlith are urging Imperial Metals Corp. (TSX:III) to leave their land, which is in the Thompson Okanagan region, about 48 kilometres east of Kamloops near the village of Chase.



AUGUST 13

Gaza Strip: Third party negotiations successfully established a ceasefire after a month of rocket attacks which killed 64 Israeli soldiers and 2,036 Palestinians. Regardless of the ceasefire conditions, Israel continues to fly armed drones over Palestinian territory.

AUGUST 15

Coast Salish Territory (Vancouver, BC): CP Rail is looking to reclaim a discontinued rail line which runs through west Vancouver. Since its decommission years ago residents have been maintaining community gardens on the property. CP brought in equipment and leveled the gardens. That evening, the windows of all the equipment were broken in retaliation.

AUGUST 16

San Francisco, CA: Activists declared their first victory in attempting to prevent the off-loading of an Israeli cargo vessel at the Oakland Port. Originally planning to show up Saturday morning to block the ship, activists sent word out late the night before that the meeting time had been moved up to later in the day as the ship had delayed its arrival in Oakland in an apparent attempt to avoid the protest.

AUGUST 17

Anishinaabeg Territory (Winnipeg, MB): Tina Fontaine, a 15 year old native girl, was found dead in a bag in the Red River in Winnipeg. This is one of the many missing and murdered aboriginal women found in Canada and is a part of the larger genocide of native women.

AUGUST 18

Mississauga Territory (Toronto, Ont): A rally was held to protest the so called joint vehicle inspection blitz(raids) done on August 14th, where border enforcement officials targeted undocumented migrants, in particular day labourers, several vans with workers were pulled over, workers were ID'd, many of which were detained.

AUGUST 19

Gaza Strip: After 6 days of ceasefires and extensions, rocket attacks resume with Hamas firing 29 rockets and Israel launching airstrikes which killed nine Palestinian. Δ

TUESDAY AUGUST 12

A demonstration was held in the morning outside the St. Louis Police Department with a list of demands. Air restrictions were issued over Ferguson to prevent interference with police helicopters and to keep media out of the area. Hackers posted pictures and personal information about the Ferguson police chief and his family online. Dorian Johnson, who was with Michael Brown when he was killed, spoke to the local news and described Michael with his hands in the air in surrender when he was killed by police.

That evening street fighting continued between the protesters and police. Police shot a protester after he reportedly pointed a handgun at them. Police charge nine protesters with felonies from the initial unrest.

WEDNESDAY AUGUST 13

It was disclosed that Brown had no criminal record when he was killed. The City of Ferguson tried to prevent vigils and demonstrations from happening in the evening. That evening, police detained mainstream reporters in a Ferguson McDonald's. As protests ramp up that evening, police attack the crowd and fire tear gas, the crowd responds with molotov cocktails and projectiles. Police threw tear gas canisters at the Al Jazeera News crew. Sixteen people were arrested and two more officers were injured.

THURSDAY AUGUST 14

Missouri State Troopers took over the policing of the Ferguson area after five consecutive nights of rioting. The president and Governors made public statements and that evening things remained relatively peaceful, apart from an incident where a group attacked a few police cars at a McDonald's.

FRIDAY AUGUST 15

Police Confirm at a press conference that Officer Darren Wilson was responsible for killing Brown on August 9th. That night, nearly 200 people fought the police with rocks and bottles. The police shoot tear gas canisters at the crowd.

SATURDAY AUGUST 16

Missouri Governor issued a state of emergency for the Ferguson area and imposed a curfew on the area. Street battles continued that night defying the curfew with seven arrests and one person shot.

SUNDAY AUGUST 17

A federal investigation and autopsy were ordered into Michael Brown's death. That evening, street battles ramped up, defying the curfew. Rocks, bottles and molotov cocktails were thrown at police and their vehicles, as they violently tried to clear the streets. Seven people were arrested and a man is in critical condition after being shot by police. Protesters began shooting back.

MONDAY AUGUST 18

The Missouri Governor ordered the National Guard in to suppress demonstrations and police Ferguson after a week of rioting. For his reasons to call in the National Guard, he cited attacks on police with molotov cocktails and firearms, as well as, sophisticated planning on the part of the local residents to try and attack the police command centre and take it over.

That day in neighbouring St. Louis, Police shot and killed a 23 year-old black man wielding a knife.

Michael Brown's funeral was held at an undisclosed location.

78 people were arrested that night as street fighting continued, along with a shoot out between protesters and police with live rounds. Two protesters are shot and four police officers injured. [△](#)



#Damline9

ON DESHKAAN ZIIBING, ANISHINABEK Territory, just outside of Innerkip in Oxford county, a group of individuals from affected communities descended onto a work site of enbridge's line 9 project. Tents were set up, and individuals vowed to stay as long as possible. The blockade lasted six days and effectively stopped work.

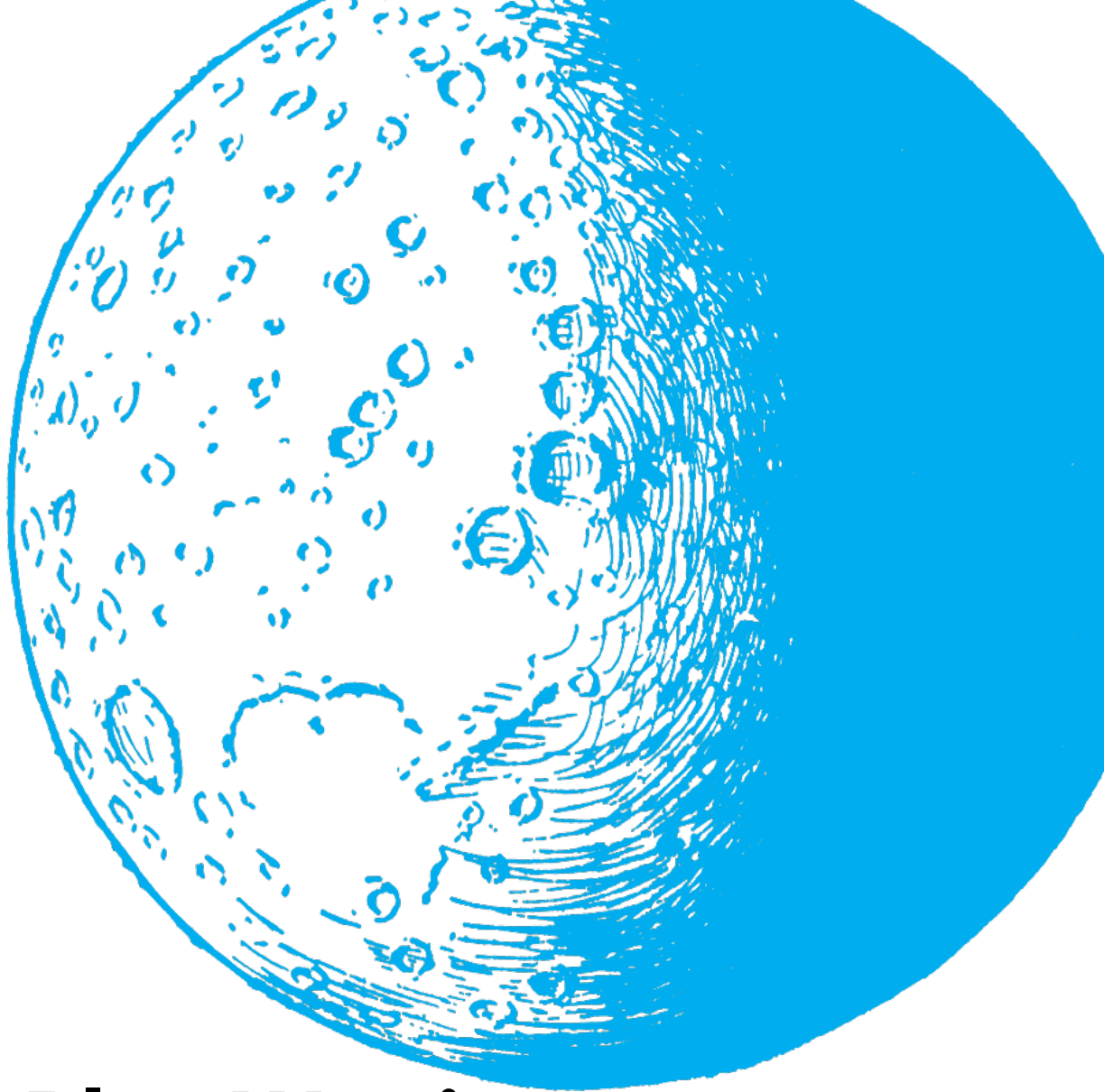
Activists state that;

"This site is currently undergoing a valve installation 500 M from the Thames River, yet this construction will not add any protection against a leak of toxic diluted bitumen into this important water source as it is located on the far side of the river. Line 9 is the same age and design as the Enbridge pipeline which caused the largest in-land oil spill in American history. Enbridge has identified more than 12,000 flaws in Line 9's structure, and the line has already leaked at least 35 times in less than 40 years."

The blockade provided a great chance for the issue of Line 9 to be discussed with not only the surrounding

community, which for the most part, was fairly supportive of the blockade, but also with other communities. On site was a garden, chickens and even a music concert on the weekend. On the morning of August 10th, police came in to read an injunction to the blockaders, stating that all individuals needed to vacate the site immediately. Protesters packed up as two blockaders locked themselves down to 1000 KG's of concrete poured into oil drums.

Three people stayed on site to support them, providing water and emotional support as a team of over twenty policemen surrounded them. Two of the three individuals were promised by police they would not be arrested. Shortly after, all three were arrested, despite abiding by all of the police's terms to avoid arrest. It took the police all day to remove the locked down blockaders. There were 5 arrests. Those arrested now face charges of: failure to obey court order, mischief over 5000, obstruct police, trespass and breach. Protesters have vowed to continue blockades, and resisting line 9. The day after the arrests a blockade in Toronto of a Line 9 construction site went up in solidarity. [△](#)



Blaq Warrior

by Blaq Warrior

IHAVE THESE THOUGHTS IN MY HEAD. WORDS. IDEAS. Images. Sounds.

At times these thoughts take up so much space inside my brain that the only way to keep me from feeling like my head might fly off my body is to smoke a lil' herb and write.

The smoke dulls the intensity of the world, allowing me space to acknowledge my thoughts, instead of running them in circles in my head. The pen is a vessel through which my thoughts escape my brain, landing elegantly, or aggressively, on a page, which once was a tree, but now lays naked in a book, waiting to be given back its life, waiting for the sweet stroke of a brush or a crayon or a pen.

Sitting by my bedroom window, looking out into the greyness of the world, I smile at the gentle contrast of green leaves fluttering in the wind. My

head hurts, and it's hard to even have my eyes open to write this, but I am compelled to write by an urge much stronger than pain. As if I have no choice, or more so, as if this moment were already written in the stars and to do anything else would be to go against my fate.

I've always felt I have a story to tell. Before now I never felt I was telling it right.

But here, in this moment, everything is all. My thoughts flow smoothly onto the page beneath my pen.

My eyelids close slowly, the sharp pain behind my third eye intensifies.

I breathe.

I acknowledge the land on which I live. Rich with life yet soaked with blood.

I acknowledge that the past does not

I think about how sensitive I am to sound. How aware I am of my surroundings. How conscious I am of my physical self. I wonder if this is part of my power. A feeling in my gut tells me it is.

dissipate. It simply blends in with the present and even races with the future. I acknowledge that time is nothing and everything all at once. And so am I. And so is everything and everyone around me, but no one seems to understand this.

Sometimes I'm scared I'm crazy. But mostly, I find peace in knowing that existence just is. And somehow I am here, in this body, on this planet called earth. And though I am stuck in this physical body, and though I know my knowledge is limited, I also know my essence is as vast and majestic as the universe.

With knowing this I feel I hold a great power. I've felt this power since I was a youth, probably since I was born. But who knows exactly how long I've felt anything, life is long, and like I said, the past blends with the present.

I breathe.

The crows outside my window sing the secret magic of creation.

I listen.

In the distance I hear police sirens and the faint sound of a brass marching band. Periodically, a car drives by my house. I hate the sound of cars. Their motors roar so loud and the sound of rubber tires on pavement seems to linger in the distance forever.

I think about how sensitive I am to sound. How aware I am of my surroundings. How conscious I am of my physical self. I wonder if this is part of my power. A feeling in my gut tells me it is.

I think I about how in tune I am with my spiritual self. I think about how aware I am of how I'm growing and learning every day. I think about how nobody knows what I feel, what I think, what I learn, how I grow. I think about how nobody knows that every night, I travel, through mind and sight, through dreams of light and darkness.

I think about how I am only conscious all of this happening in my world, but not only my world exists. I think about how there are millions of worlds out there, worlds which I do not know of, but know they exist. I treasure these worlds, for I know that without them I would not exist.

I think about how people do not seem to acknowledge or treasure one another's existence.

I think about how different the world would be if every human were as sensitive to the world as I am.

I think about how living in this world, I am not at peace, though I have peace of heart. Living in this world, I am not at ease, for I know that evil stirs around me every second of every day. I think about how I laugh and smile on the outside but on the inside I am not happy, I am incredibly sad. I think about how every day I am disgusted by humanity's wickedness.

I wonder how most people seem to not be affected by humanity's lack of love.


At times I reach a point in my sadness where I believe that it would be easier to exist as something other than a human. But I know this not to be true.

What I do know to be true is this:

I am a star traveller, earth wanderer, water dancer, empress of magiq, lady of earth.

I believe I am here to guide humanity through metamorphosis of the mind and heart. I believe I am here to bring planet earth to eternal equilibrium.

If you wonder who I am, know this.

I am me. I am all. I am life. And this is my story. 

This was Inspired by The Allied Media Conference. Thank you for opening my heart and mind. Thank you to all the beautiful minds, old and young, who shared their wisdom through words, song, movement, smiles, presence. Thank you to the organizers for envisioning and creating a space where people can come together to learn, share and grow with one another. Thank you for the incredible dance parties. My heart goes out to all those who were part of The Allied Media Conference. All of you helped me get back in tune with my creative self and for that I am eternally grateful.



Anarchism & the English Language

Choosing Orwell's essay "Politics and the English Language" as his point of departure, the author takes contemporary anarchists to task for sloppy writing that leads to sloppy thinking by Kristian Williams

GEORGE ORWELL, IN HIS CLASSIC ESSAY, "POLITICS and the English Language," makes the case that "the English language... becomes ugly and inaccurate because our thoughts are foolish, but the slovenliness of our language makes it easier for us to have foolish thoughts."

The vices Orwell catalogued—vague phrases, dying metaphors, jargon, and general pseudoscientific pretentiousness—all help to sustain our boring prose. But worse, they also produce a stagnant and stifling mental atmosphere in which thought is commonly replaced with the automatic recitation of certain prescribed words or phrases "tacked together," as Orwell memorably put it, "like the sections of a prefabricated hen-house."

The effect on readers is certainly bad enough, but the implications for writers are more serious still. Sometimes, of course, vague and shoddy prose—and the readiness with which such is accepted—makes it possible for a writer to deliberately pass

off one thing as another, or to hide bad reasoning in a rhetorical fog. More often, however, a well-meaning writer just accepts the standard currently in use and out of witless habit uses language that alters, obscures, or nullifies his own meaning. In such cases, the writer, too, is the victim: he means to say one thing, and says another; or, he means to say something, but says nothing instead.

This dynamic poses special problems for anarchism, as a mode of thought that shuns orthodoxy on principle and should be above defrauding an audience in the fashion typical of politicians and their parties. Anarchists face the further problem that, through clumsiness and inattention, our ideas become unintelligible. This destruction of meaning occurs at many levels simultaneously: It is impossible to convince people of an idea if one cannot explain it; it is equally impossible to explain an idea if you do not understand it yourself; and it is impossible to adequately understand an idea if its



only means of expression frustrate any efforts to define or analyze it. Through this process ideas are transformed into something like the Latin mass: we in the congregation may not understand the priest's ritual mumblings, but we believe that the words will save us.

Consider, for example, a sentence like "To be allies, cisgendered people need to check their privilege."

Such a sentence is, by contemporary anarchist standards, utterly unremarkable and may even be regarded as a truism. And it contains several features that make it representative of the type of writing I am discussing. The first thing one ought to notice is the unattractive and the peculiarly un-persuasive quality of the language. Simply reading the words, it is very difficult to accept that only a single century separates this writing from the prose of Edward Carpenter or Peter Kropotkin.

Even apart from its plain ugliness, the writing is indecipherable to the uninitiated. It is dense with vague jargon terms, and offers not a single original turn of phrase, nor an image of any kind. Of its brief ten words, one—cisgendered—only exists in certain marginal academic departments and in a very narrow sliver of the political spectrum. Three others—allies, check, and privilege—are everyday English words that here take

on specialized meanings. And one of these is so ambiguous as to render the sentence practically meaningless: Does check mean to examine, or to verify? Does it mean to physically block (as in hockey), or threaten (as in chess), or to decline a bet (as in poker)? Does one check one's privilege the way one checks one's coat at the theatre, to be retrieved again after the show? Like a lot of moralistic language, this phrase manages to be prescriptive without actually being instructive: it offers us a command, but it lacks the necessary specificity to actually tell anyone what they should do in any real-world circumstance.

I'm not complaining here that the language is difficult—on the whole it is not—but that it is unsalvageably vague. It is, or should be, a problem if your idiom makes it impossible for other people to grasp your ideas; but how much worse is it if your language helps you to hide your meaning even from yourself? To a very large degree, the language here is standing in for thought. People who write this sort of thing may have some general idea of what they are trying to say—but they needn't have. They've absorbed the correct words, the way a child memorizes the Pledge of Allegiance, without much concern as to whether the words correspond to anything in particular, either in the real world or even in one's imagination.

My above example is drawn from queer politics, but one could easily multiply the cases if one so chose. (For instance: “The black bloc became a mere facet of the totalizing spectacle.”) All branches of anarchism—primitivists, syndicalists, insurrectionists, CrimethInc.—are similarly guilty, though the required code words and the preferred rhythm of the language may vary somewhat from one clique to the next. One need only pick up any issue of any anarchist publication—no matter what faction it represents—to find at least one example of similar writing.

Many of the words that occur most commonly in anarchist writing are used, I suspect, with no precise meaning in mind—or at times, with a meaning quite different from the typical usage. “Accountability,” “community,” “solidarity,” and “freedom” are used, in the overwhelming number of cases, simply as markers to signify things we like or favor. When we read, for instance, that “organizers should be accountable to the community,” we are each left to wonder who this relationship is supposed to involve, and are much less certain about what it is supposed to look like. Likewise, when we read that some group wants to “hold sex offenders accountable,” it is a fair and obvious question what they propose to actually do. Do they want them to make a public statement of apology? Do they plan to beat them up? Or do they mean, by circular logic, that they will hold them accountable by calling for them to be held accountable? It is striking how seldom such questions are ever answered—but it is more striking still how seldom they are actually asked. In both cases, the key word—accountability—has been invoked, and that is thought somehow to be sufficient.

Too often, the point of writing this way is not so much to communicate a specific idea to some real or potential readership. The words serve instead to indicate a kind of group loyalty, an ideological border between our side and the other side: we believe this, and they don’t. Or rather: we talk in this way and say this sort of thing; they talk in some other way, and say some other sort of thing.

Adopting the proper style allows one to demonstrate how radical one is. And it is a symptom of one’s writing being shaped by concerns, often suppressed

concerns, about orthodoxy. It becomes important, not only to think the right thoughts, but also—sometimes even more so—to use the right words, as though one needs to punch in the correct code, but doesn’t need to remember why that particular series of letters was selected in the first place.

Underneath this practice of mental mimicry is the sense that words are imbued with a kind of mystical essence—some being good, others bad—irrespective of context or the use to which they are being put. The policing of language is one result, usually in the form of self-censorship but sometimes under public pressure. (I was recently chastised, for example, for using the word riot; the more vague uprising or rebellion being preferable.) Once euphemism begins to creep in, it is a short distance to travel between political politeness and pure dishonesty. At the same time, and following from the same impulse, much of our rhetoric takes on a ridiculously inflated quality. Protests become uprisings, on the one hand, while a drunken fight is described as “acting out” (unless, for other reasons, we label it “abuse”). In either case, the tendency is to write according to what should have happened under the terms of one’s own favorite theory, rather than struggling to discover and describe events as they actually occurred.

Too often, too, we
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The tendency toward rhetorical inflation is driven, I believe, by a desire to make ourselves seem bigger, better, or more important than we are—even if the only people we fool are ourselves. “Actions” sound tougher than “protests” or “rallies,” even if all we do at these “actions” is walk about with signs. And it is rather

embarrassing in a political context to say “me and my friends,” so instead we say “community” when we really mean “scene,” and “scene” when we really mean “clique.” But, isn’t there the nagging suspicion that something has gone awry when we begin using the word “community” in a way that excludes our neighbours, the mail carrier, and members of our immediate family?

Once this pattern sets in, all sense of proportion washes out of our language. Descriptions of events shrink or swell, not according to any observable feature of anything that has happened, but according to an a priori formula. One need only glance at the statements issued by competing sides in some recent anarchist controversy—the latest instantiation of the perennial debates over violence and nonviolence, or militant action versus base-building, will do—to recognize that, the two sides do not just disagree about this or that specific incident, but where questions of fact arise, each side takes an attitude of almost perfect indifference.

The linguistic drift is dangerous because it makes honest discussion impossible. And, maybe more worrisome, people are surprisingly willing to fall for their own propagandistic tricks. A political movement cannot expect to succeed, or even survive, if it cannot face reality. But moreover, if its members in very large numbers do lose touch with the world beyond their own press releases and manifestos, the movement probably will not even deserve to survive.

Anarchists, of course, are not the only people to write as though the words don’t matter. Much current writing is straightforward nonsense—not only political writing, but also advertising copy, academic prose, legal decisions, religious sermons, and love songs. But aside from the slipshod quality of contemporary English, and beyond even the special vices of political propaganda, anarchism has acquired several faults that are, more or less, distinctive.

For instance, we seem to have acquired the dubious habit of adopting an everyday word, narrowing its meaning, and turning it into a kind of jargon. The above-mentioned “allies,” “privilege,” “accountability,” and “actions” are all examples—as are “process” (as a verb), “facilitate,” “recuperate,” “lifestyle” (as an

adjective), “bottom-line” (verb), “spectacle,” “safe space,” “spoke” (noun), “care” (noun), and “harm.”

Similarly, we sometimes take words that are necessarily relative and use them as though they were absolute. “Accessible” (or “inaccessible”) and “alternative” are the chief examples. Nothing just is accessible. It must be accessible to someone. Likewise, something can only be an alternative to something else. Saying that it’s an alternative to “the mainstream” is just question-begging.

More embarrassing still, many of our jargon terms are not even our own, but have been appropriated, or misappropriated, from other traditions—Marxist, Foucauldian, post-modern, Feminist, or Queer Theory. There’s nothing wrong with that on its own, and I personally admire a willingness to take good ideas regardless of the source. But we’ve started writing like undergraduates imitating their professors. We say “hegemony” when we really just mean “influence,” and “contradiction” when we’re talking about conflict, “performativity” instead of “behavior,” and so on. The results of this imitative habit are sometimes pretty odd: because of Foucault, it is now common in political writing to refer to people as bodies. Thanks to Hardt and Negri, we talk about Empire rather than imperialism. And, in a related development, we commonly talk about Capital rather than capitalism, and do so in a way that makes it sound like an ill-tempered deity rather than an economic system.

Too often, too, we present simple ideas with complex language because we think it makes us look smarter, edgier, or more radical. We pepper our language with technical terms just to show that we’ve done our homework. There seems to be an agreement on the left that it is better to write in the style of badly-translated Hegel than to write like John Steinbeck. It is even easier, provided you don’t care to be understood.

The problem of course is not with the words themselves. The problem isn’t even with abstraction. Any effort to apply the lessons from one case to another necessarily involves some form of abstraction. The problem is the avoidance of clarity in meaning. The solution, then, is not to simply to abstain from using certain words, or to substitute new jargon for old, but

to do what we can to make our writing as clear as possible. We do that through the use of fresh imagery, of concrete detail, and by taking care to spell out precisely who and what we mean whenever we’re tempted to invoke old spooks like “the people” or mystical processes like “struggle.”

The point here is not simply to describe the present state of anarchist writing, but to reverse the trends that have brought us here. And while many of the examples in “Politics and the English Language” are now very much out of date, Orwell’s advice remains sound. He offers one general principle, six rules, and six questions.

The principle is: “Let the meaning choose the word, and not the other way about.”

THE RULES ARE:

- Never use a metaphor, simile or other figure of speech which you are used to seeing in print.
- Never use a long word where a short one will do.
- If it is possible to cut out a word, always cut it out.
- Never use the passive where you can use the active.
- Never use a foreign phrase, a scientific word or a jargon word if you can think of an everyday English equivalent.
- Break any of these rules sooner than say anything outright barbarous.

It is worth noting that, were there a contemporary anarchist style guide, nearly all of these rules would be reversed: Only use figures of speech that you are used to seeing in print; Never use a short word if a long word is available; If it is possible to add a word, always add it in; Never use the active voice where you might use the passive; Always use a foreign phrase or jargon word if the everyday English word can be avoided; And write barbarously rather than violate any of these rules.

No one has formalized such commandments, and no one has had to. The slow drift of the language, and the overall cloudiness of our thought, allows us to adopt such practices without trying, and often, without consciously recognizing it. To break such habits, however, requires a conscious effort.

Orwell’s advice, put as succinctly as possible, might be summarized: Think before you write.

A scrupulous writer, in every sentence that he writes, will ask himself at least four questions, thus: What am I trying to say? What word will express it? What image or idiom will make it clearer? Is this image fresh enough to have an effect? And he will probably ask himself two more: Could I put it more shortly? Have I said anything that is avoidably ugly?

This approach assumes, of course, that the writer has some definite idea that he means to convey to the reader, that it is not his purpose to simply cycle through the fashionable platitudes in order to represent the right “line” or to rehearse stock phrases for some imaginary debate.

The purpose of anarchist writing, I believe, is—or should be—not to demonstrate how radical we are, or to dazzle our friends with our erudition, but to improve the quality of anarchist thought, to give our ideas a broader circulation, and to use those ideas to help reshape the world. But the present state of our writing, taken as a whole, seems ill-suited to every one of these aims. It produces, instead, hazy thinking, political and intellectual insularity, and, ultimately, irrelevance.

I don’t mean to suggest that the only thing standing in the way of revolution is bad prose. But it is possible that a great deal of the nonsense could be shaken out of anarchism if we commit ourselves to the clear expression of our ideas, and if we demand the same from the publications that we read. It is very difficult to write clearly unless one is also thinking clearly. And if a sentence cannot be translated from anarcho-english into plain English, there is a very good chance that it is meaningless. [△](#)

Kristian Williams is the author of *Our Enemies in Blue: Police and Power in America*, *American Methods: Torture and the Logic of Domination*, and *Hurt: Notes on Torture in a Modern Democracy*. He is presently at work on a book about Oscar Wilde and anarchism.

this article was first published in May 2013 by Crimethinc. Ex-workers’ Collective

REVIEWS



Life During Wartime: Resisting Counterinsurgency

Edited by Kristian Williams, Will Munger and Lara Messersmith-Glavin (AK Press)

Review by Bryan Hill

WHAT THE HECK IS COUNTERINSURGENCY anyway? It sounds like some obscure military terminology, which is exactly what it is. Yet, ever since I read Kristian Williams' essay, "The Other Side of the COIN", which was revised and republished in *Life During Wartime*, reading more about this obscure military theory began to pique my interest. Available online for a couple years now, "The Other Side of the COIN" ties together modern counterinsurgency theory with new community policing strategies popping up across North America. This is how I excitedly arrived at *Life During Wartime* published by AK Press.

Published as a collection of essays, interviews and speeches, *Life During Wartime* attempts to look at the study of counterinsurgency methods as they are now being applied to domestic policing. The description of the book appears as if it's an elaboration of the ideas put forward in Williams' original essay, yet the collection fell short of my expectations. The readings remained quite disjointed from piece to piece, with many authors struggling to link their arguments back to the topic of counterinsurgency. Furthermore,

it seems as though some of the authors hardly understood the concept of counterinsurgency and mention it only briefly as an afterthought in their writings.

As an individual heavily influenced by the writings of insurrectionary anarchists, I read this book seeking out new arguments which articulate a critique of social control as repression which cuts across society. If you're able to sift through some bravado and shoddy translations, insurrectionary authors have articulated critiques targeting topics from the media to surveillance, from community policing to the recuperation of struggles by the left and supposed 'community leaders'.

While the arguments of insurrectionary anarchists use examples from the streets and lives of people in society, they often paint politicians, police and officials as nefarious cloak and dagger villains or conspiratorial monsters, without presenting a conception that these are real people who make conscious choices which hurt other people. They walk their dogs and think about cleaning dishes, they establish security perimeters and target poor and racialized communities.

It is this shortcoming that I hope an anarchist analysis of counterinsurgency theory and practice can fill. An analysis looking at how the state forces think, act and strategize to put down resistance.

Although *Life During Wartime* lacks the glue that seamlessly ties these essays together, there is a handful of the nineteen contributions which I would

recommend to friends and co-conspirators alike who wish to begin constructing an anarchist analysis of social control today.

To begin one's readings on the topic, *Life During Wartime* offers an interesting reading of the *US Army Field Manual on Counterinsurgency* by Kristian Williams called, "Introduction: Insurgency, Counterinsurgency, and Whatever Comes Next". Quotes direct from generals mouths provide a good basic introduction to counterinsurgency theory as it relates to the military, and Williams starts to apply a framework of why dissidents should care.

For an interesting essay on these theories in action, editor Will Munger writes a case study of Salinas Valley in "Social War in the Salad Bowl". This essay draws on a pilot program teaming up counterinsurgency theorist with the local police to target gangs and destabilized their networks. The apparent success of this project has led to police departments around the world hiring their own military consultants in domestic policing.

Although deviating from discussing counterinsurgency explicitly, the strongest piece in this collection was the transcription of Elaine Brown's keynote address at the strangely named Counter-Counterinsurgency Convergence. "On Memory and Resistance" lays out in plain English the history of the United States transition from slavery to imprisonment as means of controlling uprisings and resistance within black/african communities. Brown lays out the seamless transition to



imprisonment which has kept the majority of black/africans in chains at some point throughout their life.

All in all, *Life During Wartime* feels like it is trying to introduce the ideas of social control and social war to a liberal audience but lacks an analysis which seeks to stir the pot of stagnant methods and tactics so prone to the left and campaign activists. I think some of these texts could be read and discussed by anarchists in order to further our ideas on how the state wages war on the domestic population. [△](#)

This Insane Life: Mad Pride Hamilton's Occasional Zine #1 By Mad Pride Hamilton

Review by e.war

THIS IS A GREAT ZINE BY A NEW MENTAL health/illness group based in Hamilton. This first issue contains an array of articles, art, poetry and theory all written by mad identified folks. The zine on a whole has a Dada inspired design with images and text not always where you expect to find them. It inspires and excites me to know that self-identified mad folks (who identify in many different ways) are writing, creating, and producing a zine about the topic that affects their lives in a large (and sometimes small) way. Not only a cathartic zine, an informative and eye opening one! [△](#)

[Mad Pride Hamilton B/W 54 Pgs](#)
www.madpridehamilton.ca



Radical Self Healing By Jessica Montbello

Review by e.war

THERE ARE TWO SECTIONS IN THIS ZINE, the first is Jessica's own recipes for physical and mental healing written in her own hand. These recipes include a cold and flu remedy, migraine prevention, anxiety relief and many more. The second section (found in the middle of the zine) includes art submitted by friends, affirmations and healing words brought to life in beautiful full color photographs and art. *Radical Self Healing* is a practical zine wherein Jessica didn't worry about making

every page a work of art. Jessica's focus in this zine is about getting these recipes and tips out into the world and sharing her knowledge and experiences in a vital and authentic way. [△](#)

[Jessica Montbello, 36 Pgs, Color cover and art.](#)



September 8-15

M

**The Commercialization & Appropriation
of Black Identity**

5pm to 8pm at GRCGED in Room UC107

8

.....
GRCGED Open House

11am to 3pm at GRCGED in Room UC107

T

Film Screening: **Slingshot Hip Hop**

5pm to 7pm UC 411

9

W

.....
**Program Cuts and the Future of Post-
Secondary Education at UofG**

4pm to 5pm in UC 103

10

.....
Safer Sex for All Genders

1pm to 3pm at GRCGED in Room UC107

T

**An Introduction to Immigration Detention
& Letter Writing**

5pm to 7pm at GRCGED in Room UC107

11

.....
Sunny Drake's "Transgender Seeking..."

7pm to 9pm in Peter Clark Hall

F

Virgo Haze: Back to School Daze

10pm to late at Atmosphere Cafe, 24 Carden St

12

.....
S

Film Screening: **Pay It No Mind**

7:30 to 9pm at Goldie Mill

13



**KEEP
GROWING**

**KEEP
LEARNING**

